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by CHARLES Simeon

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by CHARLES Simeon

VOLUME 9

JEREMIAH
through
DANIEL

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JEREMIAH.

OUTLINE NO. 1026

THE INGRATITUDE OF MEN.

Jer. ii. 4—6. *Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, Where is the Lord, that brought us up out of the land of Egypt?*

HOW marvellous is the condescension of Almighty God! There is not in the universe a man that would bear with his fellow-man as God beareth with his people. Amidst all the indignities that they offer him, he follows them with entreaties, reasonings, expostulations, if by any means he may prevail upon them to turn to him, and thus to avert from themselves his merited displeasure. In my text, all Israel are challenged by him to assign a reason for their contemptuous treatment of him. As by the Prophet Micah he says, "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me[a]:" so here he challenges them all to say, "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?"

Here we are called to consider,

I. The complaint he makes—

Grievous, indeed, had been the departure of God's people from him, and their insuperable attachment to idols. Jeremiah says of them: "It is the land of graven images: "they are mad upon their idols[b]."

[a] Mic. vi. 3. [b] Jer. l. 38.

And this was the more wonderful, because they believed that Jehovah had brought them out of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness, and established them in Canaan; and yet they did not, as one might have supposed, desire to know and serve *Him*, but turned their backs upon him, and sought in preference "the vanities of the Heathen[c]," even their idols of wood and stone.

But if God utters this complaint against his ancient people, how much more justly may he urge it against *us*. For there is in *us*, alas!

1. The same folly—

[What has been the uniform tenour of our lives, but one constant state of departure from God, and a preferring of every vanity before him? True, we have not bowed down to idols of wood and stone: but we have cared for nothing, yea, and thought of nothing, but the pleasures, or riches, or honours of this vain world. Look at persons in early youth; see them growing up to manhood; see them in full maturity of mind and body; yea, look at them when grey hairs are come upon them, aye, and when bowed down with the infirmities of age; what is it they are seeking after? and what is it to which they look for satisfaction? It is the world, in some shape or other. Though they have found all that they ever enjoyed to be, in fact, nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit," yet they go on in the same infatuated course from year to year, withholding their hearts from God, who alone can make them happy, and setting their affections upon things which never did, nor ever can, administer to their comfort. In a word, "they forsake God, the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water[d]." ———]

2. The same ingratitude—

[If their ingratitude was base, who inquired not after Him who had redeemed them from Egypt, what must ours be, who have been redeemed from death and hell; and redeemed, too, not as Israel, by a mere act of power, but by the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God! Consider, in reference to the points specified in the passage before us, *from what bondage we have been delivered; what provision God has made for us in the way;* and *what a rest he has prepared for us at the end*[e]*!* What were the afflictions of Egypt, in comparison of the

[c] Deut. xxxii. 21. Jer. xiv. 22. [d] ver. 13 [e] ver. 6, 7.

miseries of hell? And what were the cloudy pillar for their direction, and the manna and water for their support, in comparison of the in-dwelling of the Spirit of God in our souls, as our Guide, our Sanctifier, and our Comforter? And what was a short possession of Canaan, in comparison of an eternal inheritance in heaven? What the Jews enjoyed was a mere shadow only, of which we possess the substance: and all this bought for us by the precious blood of Christ, who laid down his life for us?

Now, it might well be supposed that we should be continually inquiring after this Saviour; and that we should not have so much as a wish but to know *him*, love *him*, serve *him*, glorify *him*, and enjoy *him*. But has this been the case with us? Have we not, on the contrary, passed days, weeks, months, and years, without any anxious desire after him, or any diligent pursuit of him? Look back, I pray you, and see what has been the state of your souls, from your youth up even to the present moment. Compare your feelings about the things of this world, its cares, pleasures, vanities; and say whether *they* have not engrossed your minds far more than the Lord Jesus, and all the wonders of redeeming love. Tell me, then, What can exceed your ingratitude? and how justly may God be filled with indignation against you! — — —]

From this complaint, we pass on to notice,

II. His challenge in relation to it—

"What iniquity have your fathers found in me," to justify such conduct towards me? — — — This was altogether unanswerable by *them:* but how much more so by *us!*

I now, in God's name, challenge every one of you to say, What have you ever found in the Lord Jesus Christ that merits such treatment at your hands?

1. Have you ever found him a hard Master?

[The Jews might have said, that God imposed "a yoke upon them, which neither they nor their fathers were ever able to bear:" but can you speak thus of Christ's yoke? Has he not declared, and do not your consciences attest, that "his yoke is easy, and his burthen light? Verily, there is not one of his commandments that is grievous;" not one "*in* the keeping of which you will not receive" a present, as well as an eternal, "great reward."]

2. Have you found him, in any one respect, less gracious or merciful than he professed to be?

[Where is there a truly penitent soul that he ever spurned from his footstool? — — — Where is there one who ever cried to him for help, and did not find his grace sufficient for him? — — — Who ever delighted himself in him, and did not experience a reciprocation of his love? — — — And whom did he ever leave or forsake, provided he, on his part, "cleaved with full purpose of heart unto him?" — — — May he not address every one of you in the words nearly following my text; "O generation! Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore then say ye, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee[f]?" Yes, Brethren, I challenge you, and God himself invites the whole world to sit in judgment, and decide the controversy between us: "O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes[g]?"]

TELL me then,

1. What will ye say in justification of yourselves?

[Are ye not guilty? and have ye so much as a shadow of an excuse for your base conduct? When the Lord Jesus, at the Last Day, shall call you to account, and say, Why did you prefer every vanity before me? — — — Why did not all the wonders which I had wrought for you, in bearing your sins and expiating your guilt, find a place in your minds, and constrain you to surrender up yourselves to me? — — — Tell me, will not your mouth be shut? Will you not then be amazed at the iniquity that was in YOU? — — — I pray you, then, put aside all your self-vindicating delusions, and cast yourselves at the feet of Jesus, crying, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" — — —]

2. What line of conduct will ye henceforth pursue?

[Will ye go on in your neglect of God and his Christ, and in a determined pursuit of earthly vanities? I trust ye will not. I do hope that you will see how unreasonable such conduct is, and will from this time turn unto God with your whole hearts. And see, for your encouragement, how rich are the offers of his grace! He says concerning you, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense; but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, and wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that (What? will pour out my judgments

[f] ver 31. [g] Isai. v. 3, 4.

upon thee? No: but that) blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance (of this promise): let us plead together: "declare thou (thine affiance in it), that thou mayest be justified[h]." Verily, it seems incredible that God, that God whom we have so offended, should address us in such terms as these. But these are the very words of God, addressed even to the most rebellious of the human race. Apply them, then, to your own souls, my Brethren, and seek now the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Then shall you, notwithstanding all your past wickedness, find favour with God, and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son shall cleanse you from all sin."]

[h] Isai. xliii. 22—26.

OUTLINE NO. 1027

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.

Jer. ii. 12, 13. *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

RELIGION may be considered as of two kinds, theoretical and practical. In the term *theoretical,* I include every thing that is necessary to prove the truth of Christianity: and under the term *practical,* whatever is required of those who embrace it. To understand the theoretical part, is desirable; to perform the practical is necessary. The two kinds, however are not necessarily united: the theoretical may exist where the practical is disregarded; and the practical may exist, where the theoretical is unknown. Thousands of pious persons have neither leisure nor talent for collating manuscripts, or for weighing the evidences that may be adduced in favour of particular hypotheses: and to say that these cannot be religious, because they are wanting in critical acumen, would be as absurd as to say that a man cannot be honest, because he has not sufficient knowledge of the laws to be a judge. The unlettered Christian assumes the truth of Christianity; and he finds it true by its effects. And such persons may

well refer to the effects, in proof of the truth of that religion which they profess. But it is one thing to refer to practical effects, and another to ground their faith on any transient feelings: *This* no man of reflection can do: the other, no man of piety can forbear. Feelings may be excited by erroneous notions, as well as by those which are just: but holiness, radical and universal holiness, can be produced by Christianity alone. We will appeal to all the religions that ever appeared upon the face of the earth, and ask, Whether any of them ever produced in their votaries such effects as were visible in Christ and his Apostles? The reason is plain: It is the Spirit of God who sanctifies: and he is promised to those only who believe in Christ: and consequently, his sanctifying energy, in its full extent at least, can be found in them alone. I grant that it would be wrong to rest the truth of our religion on that ground only; but surely it may properly be referred to, as an additional and corroborating proof of our religion. If this be not a proper test of our religion, whereby shall the superior excellency of Christianity be known? If the Bible produce no better effects than the Koran, I do not hesitate to say that it is no better than the Koran: but if its effects be such as no other religion can produce, then will those effects be, though not the only, yet a solid and important proof of our religion: and those who cannot enter into learned disquisitions about the credibility of the Scriptures, have reason to thank God that they have within themselves an evidence of the truth of Christianity, which the objections of infidels can never set aside[a]. The error lies

[a] The author does not mean, that this is the *only* evidence which unlearned men have of the Divine authority of the Bible. They, as well as the learned, have other grounds for their faith. They see the provision, which the Bible makes for their restoration to happiness, to be precisely such as their necessities required. They see also, that the purity of its commands has a wonderful tendency to elevate their nature, and to produce universal happiness: and these two things form in their minds a strong *internal* evidence of the Divine origin of the Bible; whilst the general and long-continued reception of that book amongst those who have spent their whole lives in investigating

in confounding the two kinds of religion. They are distinct; and they should be kept so.

To enter deeply into the theory of religion, much strength of intellect, much general knowledge, and much patient investigation are requisite. To have just, and even enlarged, views of the practical part, little is wanting but a humble teachable mind, enlightened by the truths, and sanctified by the influence, of the Gospel of Christ. The former, when possessed in the highest degree, will consist with all manner of evil tempers, and evil habits: the latter necessarily involves in it a change both of heart and life. The former is of importance principally to those, whose office calls them to defend the outworks of Christianity against the assaults of infidels: the latter is essential to the happiness of every individual. To the former your mind is now directed from time to time, by a zealous and learned professor[b], who is giving us the result of his own laborious researches, and commendably exerting his talents to promote amongst us the too much neglected study of sacred literature: to the latter, which we consider as more appropriate to the ordinary services of the Church, we would on the on the present occasion solicit your attention.

The subject which we would submit to your consideration, is a solemn charge, brought by God himself against his people of old. They were guilty of gross idolatry; and for that, in part, they are here reproved: the very heavens are summoned to bear witness against them, and to express with utter astonishment their abhorrence of such impiety. But

its authenticity, serves in their minds as a strong *external* evidence, that the Bible is really given by the inspiration of God. Nevertheless, their actual experience of a change of heart and life, wrought in them by the Bible, is *to them* a strong *additional* evidence of its Divine authority. Of course, this change cannot produce any conviction in the minds of *others;* because none but God and a man's own conscience can know the full extent of that change.

[b] The Rev. Herbert Marsh, D. D. now The Right Rev. Lord Bishop of Peterborough, of St. John's College, Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity; who was giving Public Lectures in the University Church, on the principal subjects connected with Theological Learning.

another complaint against them was, that, in their straits and difficulties, they were ever looking to Egypt and Assyria for help, instead of relying on the Lord their God. Now if, in respect of gross idolatry, the passage be thought more immediately applicable to them, it will nevertheless, as a charge of spiritual idolatry, be found to contain ample matter of accusation against ourselves.

Let us then consider,

I. The evils which God lays to our charge;

II. The light in which they should be viewed.

I. The evils which God lays to our charge are, that we have forsaken him, and sought our happiness in the creature rather than in the Creator. He justly calls himself "the fountain of living waters:" for he is, and must be acknowledged to be, the only source of all good. What is there in the visible creation, that is not the product of his power, and the gift of his grace? or what is there that can afford satisfaction to the souls of men, or to the bright intelligences of heaven, which does not emanate from his presence and love? If it be replied, that many sources of consolation are opened for us in the contemplations of reason, or the gratifications of sense; we answer, That the very capacity to communicate or receive pleasure is the fruit of his bounty; and that the creature can be no more to us than what he is pleased to make it.

What then does he require of us? He calls us to regard him as the one source of happiness to ourselves; to acknowledge him in all that we have; and to trust in him for all that we stand in need of. He calls us to resemble our first parents in their primitive state; yea, to resemble the very angels around his throne; and to delight ourselves in him, as our Friend, our Portion, "our eternal great Reward." By sin, indeed, we are become incapable of fulfilling these duties, or of experiencing these enjoyments, to the extent we ought: but still God desires to restore us to the felicity which we have lost, and to communicate

to us all those blessings which we have forfeited by our transgressions.

Happy would it be for us, if we were duly impressed with this unmerited kindness and unbounded mercy. But, instead of seeking blessedness in him, we forsake him utterly: we cast off his yoke, we trample on his laws, we cast him even out of our thoughts.

Now let us see what is that rival which we prefer: it is the creature, justly called "a broken cistern." Some look for happiness in the gratifications of sense; others in the attainment of wealth or honour; others, in the pursuits of science or philosophy. We beg to be clearly understood when speaking on this subject: we do not mean to condemn pleasure, honour, wealth, or science, as evil in themselves: they all have their legitimate and appropriate use, and all may be pursued and enjoyed in perfect consistency with a good conscience. It is quite a mistake to think that religion is opposed to any of these things: on the contrary, it leads to the richest enjoyment of created good, and enjoins, instead of prohibiting, a diligent performance of every known duty. If subordinated to religion, and pursued for God, (we repeat it,) the pleasures of sense may be possessed, and the duties of every station discharged: nay more, we declare, that no man can be religious without endeavouring to fulfil the duties of his calling, whether they be commercial or military, philosophical or religious. But the evil incident to these things consists in making them the great end of our life; in suffering them to draw away our hearts from God, or to occupy that place in our affections which is due to God alone. It is in *this* view that we are to be understood as denominating the pursuit of these things "*evil*;" and we doubt not but that the consciences of all attest the truth of our statement, and accede fully to that apostolic, that incontrovertible position, that to "love and serve the creature more than the Creator" is idolatry.

We have digressed a little, for the purpose of being more clearly understood. Let us now return to our observation, that the creature, which is suffered to

rival God in our affections, whatever it may be, is only "a broken cistern." Who will venture to say that he has ever found solid and permanent satisfaction in the creature? Who has lived any considerable time in the world without learning, by his own experience, the truth of Solomon's observation, that "all below the sun is vanity?" Yet, whatever our experience has been, we still follow our own delusions, and run after a phantom, which, while we think to apprehend it, eludes our grasp. We think that the pleasures of the world will make us happy: we follow them, and for a moment dream that we are happy; but we awake, and find that it was but a dream. We next try wealth or honour: we run the race; we attain the prize; and find at last that we have been following a shadow. We imagine, perhaps, that science and philosophy, being so much more elevated in their nature than the common concerns of life, will form a kind of Paradise for us: we labour, we press forward, we become distinguished for high attainments, but are as far off from solid happiness as ever; and are constrained to join our testimony to that of the wisest of men, after he had "sought out all things that are done under the heaven," that even wisdom, with all its high attainments, is only "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Such is the charge which God has exhibited against us; and we appeal to every man's conscience for the truth of it. Is there so much as one amongst us whose conscience does not tell him, "Thou art the man?" We are God's people, as much as the Jews of old were: "He hath nourished and brought us up, and yet we have rebelled against him: The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Notwithstanding a secret conviction that God was the only source of real happiness, we could not prevail upon ourselves to seek after him: and notwithstanding our daily experience of the insufficiency of the creature to make us happy, we could not relinquish the vain pursuit. We have hewn out one

cistern, and found it incapable of retaining any water: we have then renewed our labour, and hewed out another; which we have found as unproductive of solid benefit as the former. We have even worn ourselves out with the pursuit of various and successive vanities, yet have persisted in our error, untaught by experience, and unwearied by disappointments. Even to the close of life "we hold fast deceit;" "we refuse to return;" "a deceived heart hath turned us aside, so that we cannot deliver our souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Will any contend, that these pursuits are not evil? Surely they are evil in the sight of God. So far from passing over the whole as of small account, he disjoins and separates the different parts of his charge, and declares, that on account of each we are involved in guilt. Our neglect of him has been exceeding sinful, as our attachment to vanity has also been: "My people have committed *two* evils."

But on this part of our subject we shall enter more fully, whilst we consider,

II. In what light we should view these evils—

We are apt to palliate our conduct, and to say, What great harm is there in these things? But if we look to our text, we shall see that they are both *heinous in themselves,* and *terrible in their consequences.* In respect of *heinousness,* I scarcely know whether is greater, their *guilt* or their *folly.* Only let us consider what advantages we have enjoyed for the knowledge and service of God. Is it nothing that we have been endowed with such noble capacities, and have neglected to improve them; insomuch that the progressive enlargement of them has tended rather to increase our alienation from God, than to bring us nearer to him? Is it nothing that we have had the inspired volume in our hands, and yet have scarcely differed at all, except in speculative notions, from the heathen? Is it nothing that we have provoked God to jealousy with things which cannot profit, and preferred even the basest lust before him? Is it nothing that we have

despised redeeming love, trodden under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? Should we account it a light matter, if we ourselves were treated thus by our servants and children; if they cast off all regard for us, and poured contempt upon us, and set at nought our authority, neglecting every thing that we commanded, doing every thing that we forbade, and persisting in such conduct for years together, in spite of every thing we could say or do to reclaim them? And if *we* should resent such conduct, shall not *God* much more? But, whatever we may think of these things, God calls them "*evils*," and such too as may well excite "astonishment" amongst all the hosts of heaven: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this!"

Nor is the *folly* of such conduct less than the malignity. Suppose only that one half the labour which we have used in the pursuit of vanities had been employed in the service of our God; or suppose that only the Sabbaths (a seventh part of our time) had been improved with that assiduity and constancy which we have exerted on other days in the pursuit of this world; I will venture to say, that had even that measure of piety been exercised by us, we should have been far happier here, and should have had infinitely better prospects in the eternal world. What amazing folly, then, have we been guilty of! Truly, if the fact were not proved beyond a possibility of doubt, it would not be credited, that persons possessed of reason could act so irrational a part. But, to view it in a proper light, we should attend to the representation given of it in the text. It is true, the picture is so strong, and yet withal so exact, that we shall scarcely endure to look at it. But let us contemplate it a moment: let us imagine to ourselves a person dwelling close to a perennial spring of water, and yet with great labour and fatigue hewing out first one cistern, and then another, and, after multiplied disappointments, dying at last of thirst. By what name should we designate this?

Should we be content with calling it folly? Should we not soon find for it a more appropriate and humiliating term? Let us take this then as a glass wherein to view our own likeness: it is no exaggerated representation, but the precise view in which God sees our conduct. We are aware, that the idea suggested implies such a degree of infatuation as almost to provoke a smile: but the more humiliating the picture, the more need there is that we should contemplate it: and my labour will not have been lost, if a few only of the present assembly be led to bear it in remembrance, and to meditate upon it in their secret retirement.

We have further to remark, that these evils are represented in the text as *terrible also in their consequences*. Men do not like, in general, to hear of this: they wish rather to have it kept out of sight. But it is melancholy that they should so labour to deceive their own souls. If, by concealing the consequences of sin, we could ward them off and prevent them, we should be the last to bring them forward to your view: but if it be the surest way to draw them down upon you, surely we should deserve ill at your hands if we forbore to warn you of them. It is not thus that the Prophets and Apostles acted: nor is it thus that God would have us act. He bids us to "warn the wicked of their evil ways:" and declares, that if we neglect to do so, he "will require their blood at our hands." In order then that the danger of such sins as are here laid to our charge may appear, consider what are the representations given of it in the Holy Scriptures. If there be one image more terrible than another, it is that of lying down in a lake of fire and brimstone, ever to be consuming and unconsumed: yet that is the image repeatedly employed by Christ himself, in order to represent the misery that awaits the impenitent and unbelieving world. This will account for the extreme anxiety and sorrow which holy men of old expressed when contemplating the danger to which their fellow-creatures were exposed: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes," says David, "because men keep not thy

law:" And again, "I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake thy law." Indeed, how is it possible to entertain light thoughts of this, if we only consider what have uniformly been the feelings of men, the very moment that they have come to a just sense of their state? See the jailor's agitation; or hear the cries of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. Nay, we need only consider what our own apprehensions sometimes have been, when sickness has come upon us, or death appeared to be nigh at hand. But, if yet we be disposed to doubt, let us ask, Wherefore is it that God calls on the heavens to "be horribly afraid, and to be very desolate?" Is there no cause for such language? Is it intended only to alarm us, and to excite unfounded apprehensions? No, surely: it is founded in truth: it is the effusion of unbounded love; the compassionate warning of a tender Father. Permit me, then, once more to say, that the forsaking of the Fountain of Living Waters is an evil, a great evil; and that the hewing out of broken cisterns for ourselves is also a great evil. God views these evils in all their malignity: the angels also that are around the throne, view them with deep solicitude, anxiously desiring to see us escape from them, and waiting in readiness to rejoice over our return to God. O that we might no longer indulge a fatal security! "no longer say, Peace, peace! lest sudden destruction come upon us without any way to escape!" If God were a hard master, and his service irksome, there would be some shadow of excuse for such conduct. But, who ever sought after God in vain, provided he sought in sincerity and truth? and, whoever found him without finding in him all that could comfort and enrich the soul? God himself puts the question; "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?"

Shall we plead, as an excuse, that religion is a

source of melancholy? Surely they who harbour such an opinion have never known what religion is. That a neglect of religion will make us melancholy, is clear enough, as well from the dissatisfaction which, notwithstanding our diversified enjoyments, generally prevails, as from the disquietude which men feel in the prospect of death and judgment. But religion, true religion, brings peace into the soul: it leads us to the Fountain of Living Water, where we can at all times quench our thirst, and taste beforehand the felicity of heaven. Our blessed Lord invites us to him in this view: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and "the water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life." Listen, then, to that expostulation of the prophet; "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Return to the Fountain; and make the experiment, at least: see whether there be not more happiness in turning from vanity, than in embracing it; in seeking after God, than in forsaking him; in the holy exercises of prayer and praise, than in a brutish neglect of these duties; in applying to your souls the promises of Christ, than in a profane contempt of them: and, lastly, in obtaining sweet foretastes of heavenly bliss, than in reluctant approaches towards an unknown eternity. O that I might not commend this Fountain to you in vain! All ranks and orders amongst you are beginning to shew a laudable attention to the theory of religion: O that you might begin to shew it to the practice also! You are not backward to manifest your approbation of that zeal which directs you to the *evidences* of religion: be ye not therefore offended with that which solicits your attention to its *effects*.

OUTLINE NO. 1028

THE EVIL OF BACKSLIDING.

Jer. ii. 19. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God.*

SIN and misery are very nearly connected; and the nearer we are to God by relation or profession, the more immediately will our transgressions be followed by tokens of his displeasure. The Israelites were God's chosen people; yet, while the Amorites, and other idolatrous nations, were left to fill up the measure of their iniquities, before they were visited according to their deserts, the Jews, especially while journeying through the wilderness, were speedily chastened for their iniquities, and made to feel the evil and bitterness of sin. Thus, only in a more secret and silent manner, does God now punish the backslidings of his people; nor does he notice only the grosser violations of his law, but the more hidden abominations of the heart, and secret declensions from the spiritual life. Indeed, he makes sin its own punishment, according to what is written in the text: to elucidate which, we shall shew,

I. In what respects our own backslidings correct us—

It is not unfrequently that, even in our temporal concerns, we suffer loss by relaxing our diligence in spiritual duties: but it is invariably found, that backslidings from God are attended with very painful consequences:

1. They wound our conscience—

[Conscience, if duly attended to, is a faithful monitor, and will upbraid us for declensions, however secret, and transgressions, however small: and when it testifies of wilful deliberate sin, when it summons us into the divine presence, and accuses us before God, it will make a *Felix* tremble, and a *Judas* abhor his very existence. This is a correction, which, as no enlightened person would willingly endure, so neither, till he return to God, or have his "conscience seared as with an hot iron," can he hope to escape.]

2. They intercept our views of God—

[God is exceeding gracious to those who walk circumspectly before him: but he has warned us that, "if we forsake him, he will forsake us[a]." *This* his people of old experienced to their cost, as the prophet told them; "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear[b]." And is this a slight correction? Let the cries and terrors of persons under dereliction[c], be to us as a beacon for our effectual admonition.]

3. They indispose us for spiritual exercises and enjoyments—

[While we maintain close fellowship with God, our duties are a source of the sublimest happiness: but when we decline from his ways, the whole work of religion becomes a burthen. Have we neglected prayer for a season, or been inattentive in it to the frame of our minds? how painful a task is it to approach our God! the most glorious of all privileges is turned into an irksome rite, to which we are goaded by a guilty conscience. The same indisposition instantly extends itself to every other office of religion; so that the visiting of the sick the conversing on spiritual subjects, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and indeed the whole life of religion is bereft of vital energy, and degenerates into an empty and unproductive form. What an awful punishment is this!]

4. They lay us open to the incursions of sin and Satan—

[Righteousness is, as it were, a breast-plate that guards our vitals, and proves an armour on the right hand and on the left[d]: but unwatchfulness deprives the soul of its defence, and exposes us to the envenomed darts of our great adversary. If we have secretly declined from God, the temptations, which once were easily overcome, have a deep and lasting effect: our spirits are soon ruffled; our evil passions are soon awakened; and, if God interpose not for our recovery, we shall soon "return with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire." Sin, of any kind, makes a breach in the soul, which, if not stopped at first, will widen, till our desolation is inevitable, and our ruin final. Who can but tremble at the warning which God himself has given us; "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his own sins[e]?"

[a] 2 Chron. xv. 2. [b] Isai. lix. 2.
[c] Ps. lxxvii. 1—9. and lxxxviii. 3—16.
[d] Eph. vi. 14. 2 Cor. vi. 7. [e] Prov. v. 22.

Additional light will be reflected on this subject, while we consider,

II. The evil and bitterness of a backsliding state—

The sinfulness of an ignorant and carnal state, heinous as it is, is by no means comparable to the guilt of backsliding from God. To view backslidings in their real *malignity* we must remember that they involve in them,

1. A violation of the most solemn engagements—

[The man, who professes to be a follower of Christ, pledges himself by that very profession to devote himself entirely to the service of his God: he declares, as it were, his approbation of his baptismal covenant, and his determination through grace to adhere to it in all things. But, in proportion as he yields to open sin or secret declensions, he revokes all his promises, and renounces all his expectations of the Divine favour. How vile, and how desperate, must such a conduct be in the eyes of God!]

2. A contempt of the richest mercies—

[While we serve God aright, we never find him backward to recompense our worthless endeavours: the more diligently we have sought him, the more abundantly has he enriched us with grace and peace. When therefore we forsake him, we say, in fact, that we neither love "nor fear him," (see ver. 19.) yea, that we despise his mercies, and prefer the pleasures of sin before any of the pleasures which he can afford us. What base ingratitude, what daring insolence is this!]

3. A vindication of God's open and avowed enemies—

[Practical piety condemns the world; but impiety, as far as it extends, proclaims to all, that God is not worthy to be loved and served. The backslider goes further still; and says to all around him, I have tried God, and found him to be "a wilderness to his people[f]:" I once was weak enough to think that the more religious I was, the more happy I should be: but I was disappointed in my hopes; and now revert to my former ways, that all may know the superior happiness, which, in my opinion at least, is to be enjoyed in freedom from restraints, and in the gratifications of time and sense. Alas! on what a precipice does the backslider stand! and, what an account will he have to give at last, if he do not instantly return to God in penitence and faith!]

Nor is the *bitterness* of such a state easy to be appreciated—

[f] ver. 31.

[If we would "know and see" what a "bitter thing" it is to forsake the Lord, let us consult the declarations of God, "the Lord God of hosts," and the experience of his ancient people. What "broken bones" did the fall of David occasion[g]! And where was the blessedness which the Galatian Church had once enjoyed, when, through the influence of their false teachers, they had declined from the simplicity of the Gospel[h]? Indeed, let any man consult the records of his own conscience, and he will soon perceive, that, as there is no happiness to be compared with a state of nearness to God, so there is no misery like that which a sense of his departure from us will occasion. As for the bitterness of it to apostates in the day of judgment, that cannot be described; and we pray God we may never be left to feel and endure it. But let us study to "know and see" it in its true light, that we may be stirred up by the consideration of it to "cleave unto our God with full purpose of heart."]

[g] Ps. li. 8. [h] Gal. iv. 15.

OUTLINE NO. 1029

SELF-VINDICATING SINNERS REPROVED.

Jer. ii. 23, 24. *How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? See thy way in the valley; know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways; a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure: in her occasion who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves: in her month they shall find her.*

IN estimating our state before God, we ought to mark the circumstances under which our sins are committed, and the aggravations of our guilt in that particular view. It is in this light that our iniquities are viewed by God. The mercies we have received from him; the resolutions which, under a sense of those mercies, we have formed; the degree in which we have degenerated; all these things are marked by God, and form an accumulation of wickedness far exceeding that of any individual acts[a]. But there is one evil which enhances our guilt beyond every other that can be named; and that is, a self-justifying spirit, and a denial of the accusations which God, in his word, and by his ministers, brings against us. That I may guard you against this, which is so pre-eminently offensive to the Divine Majesty, I will set before you,

[a] ver. 20—22.

I. The self-vindicating ways of sinners—

Ministers are commanded to "shew the house of Israel their transgressions and their sins." And it might be supposed, that, when men's iniquities are so visible and undeniable, they would fall under the accusation, and humble themselves before God. But they, for the most part, justify themselves against the charge that is brought against them: some,

1. In a way of direct denial—

[A remarkable instance of this we have in Cain. After he had murdered his brother Abel, the Lord came to him, and said, "Where is Abel, thy brother? and he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?[b]" What astonishing effrontery was here? Yet is it precisely such as we see generally exhibited by those around us. We ask them, in God's holy name, Why "they live as without God in the world," and without any just concern about their eternal interests? But they deny the charge; "They do not neglect God: they do not disregard their own souls: they do not "cast God's word behind them," and "pour contempt on all the wonders of redeeming love." Though their wickedness is as manifest as was that of the worshippers of Baal, they will still say, "I am not polluted; I have not gone after Baalim" — — —]

2. In a way of vain excuse—

[Of this we see a striking example in Saul. He had been commanded to destroy the Amalekites, and every thing that appertained unto them; and when Samuel came to him, he said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord. And Samuel said, What meaneth, then, this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Then Saul, unable to deny the fact that he had spared the best of the prey, excused himself: "They, the people, have brought them from the Amalekites, having spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God: and the rest we have utterly destroyed[c]." Thus, when men cannot deny their wickedness, they will excuse it: 'They have done nothing but what was sanctioned by custom;' or, 'They have only followed those impulses of nature which they were not able to withstand.' It is probable that the idolaters in my text did not mean to deny that they shewed some respect to their molten images; but only to say, that it was not to the images themselves, or to Baal, that they paid their homage; but to Jehovah, as repre-

[b] Gen. iv. 9. [c] 1 Sam. xv. 13—15.

sented by them. Such are the refuges of papists at this day, in all their idolatrous worship: and such the vain excuses of all the votaries of this world.]

3. In a way of hypocritical palliation—

[Here we must go back to our first parents, when interrogated respecting their eating of the forbidden fruit. The man cast the blame upon his wife; or rather upon God himself, who had given her to him: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." The woman, in like manner, shifted the blame from herself, and cast it on the serpent: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat[d]." So sinners of every description find something to palliate their guilt: 'The faults they have committed have not been of an enormous kind: the commissions have been but rare: they have not injured any one: they have had no evil intention: their hearts have been good, though their actions have not been altogether so correct.' But God seeth not as man seeth: man looketh on the outward appearance: but God seeth the heart.]

But men cannot deceive God; as will be seen by,

II. The charge which God brings against them—

However we may justify ourselves, "God will reprove us, and set before us the things that we have done[e]." In the passage before us, he substantiates his charge against his offending people,

1. By an appeal to fact—

["See thy way in the valley: know what thou hast done." In the valleys, as well as in the hills, thine idolatries obtrude themselves upon the notice of the whole world: "they are not discovered by secret search[f]:" they do not even affect concealment. And may we not say to *you* also, "See your ways in the valleys?" Look at your whole lives: what are they but one continued scene of rebellion against God? Trace your conduct, from your youth up: what have you done, but "love and serve the creature more than the Creator?" and yet you will say, "We have not gone after Baalim." What is idolatry if this be not? and how can you "provoke God to jealousy" more than by the very conduct which you have pursued from your earliest youth? Look at your very religion: what has it been, but a mere form, without any vital power; a shadow, without any substance? It is not by occasional slips that you have fallen, but by one entire uninterrupted course of conduct. Who amongst you will deny this? What

[d] Gen. iii. 11—13. [e] Ps. l. 21. [f] ver. 24.

excuses can you find for this? What palliations can such criminal proceedings admit of?]

2. By a most apt comparison—

[The dromedary and the wild ass, when seeking their mate, are so bent upon the attainment of their desires, that all efforts to catch them are in vain: and no one will weary himself with so fruitless a labour. But, when their time of pregnancy has advanced, they fall comparatively an easy prey to the pursuer. And it is but to little purpose that we follow you with invitations, entreaties, expostulations, warnings: you "will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." It is perfectly surprising to see how little effect is produced on the minds of the generality by all the labours of the most faithful ministers. There is occasion for the same complaint in every age, and every place: "Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Let your own consciences testify whether the representation here given be not just and true.]

There is a time, however, when we may hope to prevail: and in the hope that it may have arrived, we will, in a word of APPLICATION, now address ourselves unto you—

[Happy, happy would it be, if you began at last to be "weary and heavy-laden with your sins!" This is the time that God looketh for: and it is the time that we look for also, in the hope that we may prevail upon you to return unto your God. Verily, we may ask with confidence, "What fruit have ye had of the things whereof ye are now ashamed?" What, but disappointment and misery and death? O, then, "return unto Him from whom ye have deeply revolted" — — — And what does God require of you, in order to your acceptance with him? He says, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity[g]." So, then, say I also; and know, that if you come to the Lord Jesus Christ burthened with your sins, he will speedily and most assuredly "give you rest." "Whilst you cover your sins, you cannot prosper: but if you confess and forsake them, you will have mercy[h]." Hear the beloved Apostle: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness[i]." Receive this testimony, and act upon it; "so your iniquities, how great or numerous soever they have been, shall not be your ruin[k]" — — —]

[g] Jer. iii. 13. [h] Prov. xxviii. 13. [i] 1 John i. 8, 9.
[k] Ezek. xviii. 30. Here the fulness and sufficiency of Christ may be set forth to advantage.

OUTLINE NO. 1030

THE FOLLY OF NEGLECTING GOD.

Jer. ii. 27, 28. *They have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us! But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble.*

AMONGST the various powers which distinguish man from all the rest of the creation, is the faculty of looking forward to future events, and of receiving, by anticipation, impressions suited to them. This faculty is given to him principally for the furtherance of his eternal welfare: and, if he used it aright, he could not fail of attaining eternal blessedness. But as he abuses his other powers, so does he grievously misimprove this: he employs it for the purpose of temporal advancement; but forgets its use in reference to eternity. Hence, till affliction bring him to a juster view of his condition, he casts off all fear of God, and lives, as it were, "without God in the world." Of this God complained respecting his people of old; and at the same time he warned them of the bitter consequences that would ensue from it; for, if they persisted in looking to their false gods in the time of prosperity, they should have none other to assist them in the season of adversity.

From the words thus explained, we may take occasion to shew,

I. The conduct of sinners towards their God—

Man in every age, especially if he have any knowledge of a Supreme Being, pursues nearly the same course, till he has been converted by Divine grace.

In the text we behold how he conducts himself,

1. In a state of ease—

[It is surprising to see how entirely men banish from their minds all thoughts of God. Though called and invited to draw nigh to him, they cannot be prevailed upon to bow their knees before him, and to seek his face in prayer[a]. If at any time

[a] Isai. lxiv. 7.

they draw nigh to him in public, it is not really to know his will, or to enjoy his presence, but merely to perform a duty, in which their hearts are not at all engaged[b].

But the expression in our text imports, not merely a neglect of God, but a contempt of him also. And a most awful mark of contempt it is, to turn our back upon him when he calls us, instead of turning to him our face. Yet thus it is that we treat him, exactly as his people did even in his very temple[c]: we all have idols in our hearts; and those we serve to the utter neglect of God; and, when reminded of our duty to him, we cry, "Who is the Lord? I know him not;" "I will have nothing to do with him;" "I desire not the knowledge of his ways[d]."]

2. In a state of trouble—

[Few are so hardened in iniquity, but they will begin to reflect on their ways when they come into trouble: "they will pour out a prayer, when God's chastening is upon them[e]." Even hypocrites[f], yea and heathens too[g], when reduced to great extremities, will cry for help: "In their affliction," says God, "they will seek me early[h]." Nay more, they will express, not only importunity, but, as our text intimates, a considerable measure of impatience also: as if God were bound immediately to interpose for them, though they have rejected and "forgotten him days without number[i]." The whole of their conduct is beautifully set forth in the preceding context, under the image of "a wild ass." She, when seeking her mate, is so wild, that no one will attempt to catch her: but, when the time is come for her to be delivered of her young, she may easily be caught[k]. So it is with sinners, when bent upon the gratification of their earthly and sensual desires, they prosecute their own ways without restraint, and laugh at all our efforts to apprehend them: but, when burthened and bowed down with trouble, they will suffer us to approach them, and will bear to hear the voice of counsel and reproof. Their affliction represses for a season their spirit of rebellion, and brings them to a better mind.]

Still however their conduct is most perilous, as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. The folly and danger of it—

To manifest this, we need only consider,

[b] Matt. xv. 8. [c] Ezek. viii. 16.
[d] Compare Jer. ii. 31. with Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. and lxxxi. 11. Job xxi. 14, 15. Isai. xxx. 11.
[e] Isai. xxvi. 16. [f] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. [g] Jonah i. 5.
[h] Hos. v. 15. [i] ver. 22. with Isai. lviii. 3. [k] ver. 23, 24.

1. The disappointment it will occasion—

[Even *now*, in the midst of all their pursuits, we would ask the ungodly, Whether they have ever found any solid satisfaction in the vanities of time and sense? and has not the creature invariably proved to them "a broken cistern, that could hold no water[l]?" Yes assuredly, they have "spent their money for that which is not bread, and laboured for that which satisfieth not[m];" or rather, as it is well expressed, "Have sought to fill their belly with the east wind[n]." And this is what God has repeatedly forewarned them of in his blessed word: "Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be his recompence[o]." And if even now, "in the time of their sufficiency, they be in straits[p]," how much more, *when they come into trouble*, may it be asked, "What fruit have ye of these things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Will their pleasures, their riches, or their honours, which they once sought with such avidity, then comfort them? Alas! how little can such things do to assuage even the pains of a diseased body, and much more to pacify a guilty conscience, and to compose the mind, in the prospect of death and judgment! Truly, "miserable comforters are they all." Yet to them will God leave us in the day of our calamity, if we will persist in making them our idols during the season of our health. This he tells us in our text; "Let the gods that thou hast made to thee, arise and save thee." It was thus that he mocked his people of old, when they had withstood all the corrections of his providence[q]: and thus he has declared that he will mock us also, if we continue obstinately to withstand all the overtures of his love and mercy[r].

But, even supposing that the vanities of this world were not so ineffectual for our present support as they are found to be, of what use or benefit will they be found *when we are standing at the judgment-seat of Christ?* Will they interpose between us and an angry God? or will they descend with us into those gloomy mansions to which their votaries will be doomed, and there alleviate the anguish of our minds? Will the friends, by whom we were induced to turn our back on God, confirm to us all the promises they made to us, and obtain for us that blessedness which they so confidently assured us was in no danger of being lost? Ah, the disappointment which we shall feel in that day, when no possibility remains of rectifying our error! How shall we curse our folly for giving way to such delusions, and feel that truth which we are now so backward

[l] ver. 13. [m] Isai. lv. 2. [n] Job xv. 2.
[o] Job xv. 31. [p] Job xx. 22. [q] Judg. x. 10—14.
[r] Prov. i. 24—31.

to believe, that "they who observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies[s]!"]

2. The reflections to which it will give rise—

[Here we will not give ourselves time for consideration; but when we come into the eternal world, we shall have nothing else to do[t]: and then how inexpressibly painful will it be to reflect, 'I once had a God of infinite love and mercy calling me to accept of reconciliation with him; I had a Saviour too who offered to cleanse me in his blood from all my sins, and to clothe me in the robe of his own unspotted righteousness: by his Holy Spirit also my Saviour strove with me, to bring me to repentance, and to guide my feet into the way of peace. Once had I ordinances, wherein I might have enjoyed my God; and ministers by whom I might have been led to the great Shepherd and Bishop of my soul. But now all those blessings are withdrawn, and are for ever hid from my eyes. I valued them not when they were within my reach: I had no taste but for the vanities of this world; and, like Esau, I sold heaven itself for a poor worthless momentary enjoyment: now too, like him, I am rejected, and could find no place of repentance in my Father's mind, though I should seek it ever so carefully with tears[u].' 'Now I find that God's word was true; and that the harvest which we must reap accords with the seed we sowed: "I reap now nothing but corruption, because I sowed only to the flesh;" whereas, if I could have been prevailed upon to "sow unto the Spirit, I should at this moment have been reaping everlasting life[x]." I now call to my God, and beg him to send me only a drop of water to cool my tongue; but he bids me go for relief to the gods which I preferred before him, and reminds me, that, having received the consolations which I desired, I have no other to expect at his hands[y].'

Such is the portion of those who neglect God: "they sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind[z]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those that are at ease in their sins—

[You think it time enough to seek the Lord when you are no longer able to enjoy the world. But are you sure that time will be afforded you, if you neglect the present hour; or that God will hear you, when your prayers are extorted only by pain and terrors? Such delays receive but little countenance from God in the passage we are considering, or indeed in any

[s] Jonah ii. 8. [t] Wisd. v. 4.
[u] Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. with Heb. xii. 16, 17 [x] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[y] Luke xvi. 24—26. [z] Hos. viii. 7

other part of Holy Writ[a]. "Seek then the Lord *whilst he may be found;* call ye upon him whilst he *is near*[b]."

2. Those who are brought into any kind of trouble—

[Now then at least is the time for *you* to call upon your God; for when will you do it, if not in the time of trouble? Will you stay till you are summoned before his judgment-seat? Will you not begin to look for the Bridegroom, till he has already entered into his house, and the door is shut? O look upon your affliction as the voice of God: receive it as a messenger sent from him to prepare you for his presence: and remember, if he has warned you of your danger, he has also given you encouragement to turn unto him. He has shewn you, in his reception of the Prodigal, how ready he is to receive returning penitents[c]; and, in his mercy to Manasseh, how great iniquities he can pardon[d]. Only "return then unto him; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."]

3. Those who have already begun to seek the Lord—

[Say, Whether it has been in vain to seek the Lord? Has he been "a wilderness to you, or a land of darkness[e]?" Has he not done more for you than the world ever did, and rendered you happier than you ever were in the days of your vanity? Be thankful to him then that he ever enabled you to "choose the good part, which shall never be taken away from you." If trouble come to you, you have no need to fear[f]; for it is sent by him in love to purge you from your remaining dross, and fit you for his presence, where is fulness of joy for evermore.]

[a] See Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Hos. iv. 17. Luke xix. 42.
[b] Isai. lv. 6. [c] Luke xv. 20—24.
[d] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10—13. [e] ver. 31. [f] 1 Pet. iii. 13.

OUTLINE NO. 1031

GOD'S COMPLAINT AGAINST THE REBELLIOUS.

Jer. ii. 31, 32. *O generation, see ye the word of the Lord: Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*

I AM perfectly astonished. I can scarcely believe my own eyes. Who is it that thus addresses us; and

vindicates his own character against the accusations which, by our lives at least, we bring against him? It is none other than Jehovah himself, calling upon us to prove, if we can, that he merits at our hands the treatment he has received from us. Often does he call on heaven and earth to judge betwixt him and his people[a]———But in the chapter before us, he supposes himself to be charged with having acted unkindly, not to say injuriously, towards them: "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the Lord; What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and have become vain[b]?" And again in the text, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness?" Behold, Brethren, I am now to you in God's stead: and I call upon you, in God's name, to answer to the challenge given you, and to the charge that is brought against you. Hear at my mouth,

I. His appeal, in answer to your charges against him—

Was he to the Jews a wilderness or a land of darkness?"

[The Jews, from their own history, could not but know what a terrible wilderness, and what a land of darkness, their ancestors had been brought into, when they came out of the land of Egypt: it was "a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt[c]." In a word, it was a land where they could find no sustenance, and where, but for the Divine interposition, they must all have perished. And had God been to them in any respect like that? Had he left them to perish? Had he not, on the contrary, administered to their every want, going before them in *a pillar of fire*, and supplying them with food, and miraculously preserving their very clothes from wearing out for the space of forty years; and, at last, putting them into a full and peaceful possession of the promised land[d]?———]

Has he, in his conduct to *us*, deserved any such humiliating imputation?

[a] Mic. vi. 2, 3. [b] ver. 4, 5. [c] ver. 6.
[d] *Cite* Deut. xxxii. 10—14. and Neh. ix. 21—25.

[We, also, have been passing through a dreary wilderness, in our way to the promised land: and has he been inattentive to our wants? Has he not given us his only dear Son to be our Saviour? — — — Has he not also given his Holy Spirit, to guide, preserve, and sanctify us, and to make us meet for our destined inheritance? — — — Tell me so much as one thing which you have ever lacked, provided you sought it humbly at his hands? — — — I hesitate not to affirm, that if there be any one thing that you have ever lacked, it has been, not from want of care in him, but from your own negligence in asking it: for "he never said at any time to any human being, Seek ye my face in vain." I say, then, that your charges against him, as defective in kindness or care or liberality, are altogether false; and that there is no one thing that you could reasonably hope to be done for you, which he has not freely and effectually done[e].]

But not satisfied with vindicating God, I call you to hear,

II. His charge against you—

He complains, and justly too, of two things;

1. The flagrancy of your rebellion—

[His people of old said, "We are lords: we will come no more unto thee." And such has been the language both of your hearts and lives. You have affected independence. Satan's temptation to our first parents was, "Ye shall be as gods:" and ye have affected to be as gods, even from that very hour; and have felt no disposition to come to Jehovah for any thing. In truth, independence is the very essence of the Fall: it is that which characterizes every living man. Every man trusts in his own wisdom and righteousness and strength; and follows his own will, and "walks after the imaginations of his own heart." Let any one ask himself, Whether, during his whole life, this have not been his state? Can any of us say with truth, that we have been from the beginning so deeply sensible of our own utter destitution of all good, that we have cried day and night to God for every thing which our souls needed, and have cleaved to Christ alone as our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption? Have we, even this very day, come to God for these blessings, as persons who felt their need of them, and their entire dependence on him for a supply of them? Have we not rather imagined that we were "rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing; instead of feeling ourselves wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked?" Then you must confess

[e] Isai. v. 3, 4.

that God's charge against you is true; and that, in refusing to come to him as the only source of all good, you have shewn yourselves proud, daring, impious, self-sufficient rebels, and have deserved to be visited with his heaviest judgments.]

2. The contemptuousness of your neglect—

[One would have supposed that, after all the mercies which God had vouchsafed to his ancient people, they could not but have borne him in constant and most affectionate remembrance. Yet had they in reality "forgotten him." Of this he complains, with just indignation: "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" No, worthless and contemptible as such vanities are, the minds of young people, and of females especially, are so set upon them, as scarcely, for any length of time, to have them absent from their minds. But, though God had given himself as "a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to his people[f]," and his relation to them elevated them above all the people of the world, "yet did they forget him, days without number." And has he given to *us* less occasion to remember him, than to them? Yet have *we* forgotten him, even as they did. We have forgotten *our obligations to him;* so that he receives few, if any, acknowledgments at our hands. We have forgotten *our dependence on him;* so that he hears but few and faint petitions for the blessings we stand in need of. We have forgotten *the great account which we have to give to him;* so that, to obtain an interest in Christ, is not the great labour of our lives; nor is it our daily serious endeavour to approve ourselves to God as his devoted servants. Let any one only look back for a single week, and see how much greater interest a young female takes in the adorning of her person, than we have done in providing the ornaments of divine grace for our souls, to "prepare us for our union with our heavenly Bridegroom[g]." Say, then, whether God is not justly incensed against us, and whether we have not need to humble ourselves before him, for "provoking him thus to jealousy?" Behold then, whilst on God's part I repel with indignation the charges which you bring against him, I call your very consciences to witness against you, that the charges, which I have in his name exhibited against you, are not only true, but heinous in the extreme.]

APPLICATION—

1. Are there now any of you disposed to vindicate yourselves?

[Yes: the Jews denied their criminality, whilst yet "their iniquities testified against them to their face[h]." And thus it is

[f] Isai. xxviii. 5. [g] Rev. xxi. 2. [h] Hos. v. 5.

with you. "You have even wearied God by your transgressions; and yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him[i]?" But in this you only aggravate your guilt, and augment your eternal condemnation. For thus saith the Lord: "Thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn away from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned[k]." Know ye this, every one of you, ere it be too late, that, "he who covereth his sins, shall not prosper; and that he only who confesseth and forsaketh them, shall find mercy[l]" — — —]

2. Are any of you humbled under a sense of your guilt?

[To you then I say, that He who "chose Israel, not for any goodness that was in them, but purely because he would choose them[m]," is ready to exercise his sovereign love and mercy towards you. See how, after taking them from the most helpless and degraded state, he beautified and adorned that people for himself[n]! — — — Thus will he also cleanse you from your iniquities, and transform you into his own most blessed image, and render you meet for an everlasting union with himself. This I am commissioned by him to declare: "Go, and proclaim these words unto them; and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God[o]." Yes, in the sacred name of Him whom you have offended, I declare, that "though your iniquities have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool; and though they have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow[p]."]

[i] Mal. ii. 17. [k] ver. 35. [l] Prov. xxviii. 13.
[m] Deut. vii. 7, 8. [n] *Cite* at length Ezek. xvi. 8—14.
[o] Jer. iii. 12, 13. [p] Isai. i. 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1032

COMPARATIVE CRIMINALITY.

Jer. iii. 11. *And the Lord said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.*

THE subject of comparative criminality is one on which we should enter with the greatest care, because it is rarely thought of but in a way of self-preference and self-complacency; and where these feelings are generated in the soul, the most incalculable injury has

been sustained. We are told by St. Paul, that "they who measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, are not wise[a]." Yet, for the purpose of augmenting our humiliation before God, we may, not unprofitably, consider our own superior guilt, as Israel of old were taught to do, when God spake to the prophet the words which we have just read. Both Israel and Judah had sinned grievously against him: Israel more openly; and Judah in somewhat of a more covert way: but God declared, that, notwithstanding all that might be thought to the contrary, the criminality of Judah exceeded that of Israel.

That we may learn how to judge ourselves, I shall first *state*, and then *confirm*, this decision of our God. Let me then,

I. State this decision of the Lord—

[Consider what was the state of the parties concerned. Israel, or the ten tribes, had cast off God, from the first moment that they became a nation: and they persisted in their idolatries, till they provoked God to give them up into the hands of their Assyrian enemies. As their injured husband, he gave them a bill of divorce, and would no longer acknowledge them under the relation of a spouse. Judah, on the contrary, had retained the worship of the True God; though they retained their idols, and paid divine honours unto Malcham[b]. Because of their *apparent* superiority to Israel, they would scarcely so much as own their relation to her[c]. But if their sins were somewhat less ostensible, they were committed with tenfold greater aggravations before God. Their advantages had been incomparably greater, because of the numbers of prophets that were sent to them, and the stated ordinances which they enjoyed, and the presence of God that was in the midst of them: and, inasmuch as these advantages were altogether despised amongst them, their guilt was the greater: so that it might well be said of Judah, "Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah." This judgment indeed was not exactly what Judah would have formed, nor what would approve itself, at first sight, to any amongst ourselves. We should have been ready to think that *any* religion was better than *none;* and that even the appearance of regard for God was better than an avowed contempt of him. This, how-

[a] 2 Cor. x. 12. [b] Zeph. i. 5. [c] Ezek. xxxiii. 26.

ever, was not God's judgment respecting it: he decided rather against the *form*, which was destitute of the *power* of godliness; and declared that "backsliding Israel had justified herself more than treacherous Judah."]

Now, this decision being of general importance, I will proceed to,

II. Confirm it—

It is generally thought that a profession of religion, even though it be insincere, is more pleasing to God than an open contempt of all religion. But God has determined otherwise; and has declared, that specious insincerity is worse than open profaneness, because,

1. It argues a deeper depravity of heart—

[Ungodly men persist in their impieties, without much reflection upon the guilt they contract, or the judgments they incur — — — They rush, for the most part, into sin, "like a horse into the battle." But a man professing godliness shews that he has some sense of his duty, and some desire to secure his eternal interests. Hence, in him, sin finds a conflict which it finds not in others. In him "the spirit lusts against the flesh, as well as the flesh against the spirit." He has somewhat of a conscience, which remonstrates against his evil ways: and he is constrained to stupify and sear his conscience, in order to obtain any release from the terrors with which he is assaulted in his prospects of a future judgment. He wishes indeed to save appearances, and to satisfy his own conscience: but this only proves the more fully the inveteracy of his lusts, which are able to prevail over such weighty considerations. He knows what sin deserves; and yet commits it: he knows what sin has brought on others; and yet ventures to indulge in it. His sin, therefore, notwithstanding his plausibility, is so much the more heinous, in proportion as it is committed against light and knowledge, against mercies and judgments, and against the motions of God's Holy Spirit within him. In the passage before us, this is marked with very extraordinary force. Within the space of five verses, Israel is characterized four times as "backsliding;" and Judah no less than five times as "treacherous." Now, in the estimation of all, a traitor is accounted worse than a rebel; and an adulterous wife more guilty than a licentious prostitute. The relation in which they stand to their Lord, the obligations which they owe him, and the professions which they make of their regard for his honour, greatly aggravate the wickedness which they contract: and exactly thus do the transgressions of a religious professor

exceed in enormity those committed by a mere worldly character[d].]

2. It casts more dishonour upon God—

[A man who follows his own will, without restraint, does indeed cast off the yoke of God, and shews that he is determined to brave all the consequences of his transgression. But a religious professor says, *in effect*, to all around him, 'I am God's servant; and I render to him all the service *he requires*, and all that *he deserves*. I know my duty towards him; and I perform it.' But what a shameful reflection does this cast on God! What! Does he *require* no more than this? Then he can never be considered as "glorious in holiness." And does he *deserve* no more than this? Then surely he has but little excellency in himself, and has done but little for us. But what horrible impiety is there in such insinuations as these! I had almost said, that the greatest enormities, in one who is professedly ungodly, are light in comparison of those which such a professor commits: and without hesitation will I declare, that Sodom and Gomorrha, with all their abominations, shall fare better, in the day of judgment, than he[e].]

3. It does more extensive injury to man—

[Who thinks of pouring contempt on God on account of the impieties of a profane character? But let a man, who makes a profession of religion, transgress, and immediately religion itself is condemned, and "the way of truth is evil spoken of" on his account; yea, and the very name of God himself also is blasphemed. If the faults of such an one be of a more venial kind, then the world plead his example, and think themselves at liberty to do, every day of their lives, what he has done occasionally under the influence of temptation: or, if his sins be more heinous, then all religious people are regarded as hypocrites for his sake; and the ungodly harden themselves in their wickedness, and account themselves quite as good as those who make a profession of religion. Truly, to cast such a stumbling-block before men is a fearful evil; and the certainty of such effects renders the sins of religious persons far more criminal than those who live altogether as without God in the world.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are careless about religion—

[You are ready to justify yourselves on this ground, that you make no profession of religion, and therefore are not hypocrites. But if we acknowledge that you are not so

[d] Amos iii. 2. [e] Matt. xi. 24.

criminal as some others, yet look at the judgments executed on Israel, and see what you yourselves must expect. Truly, a bill of divorce is that which must be put into your bosom; and an eternal separation from your God will ensue — — — But see the invitation given you from the Lord[f] — — — and turn unto him whilst yet his arms are open to receive you — — —]

2. Those who make a profession of religion—

Take particular notice what Judah's sin was: it was, that "she turned not to the Lord with her whole heart, but feignedly." Now it is with your whole heart, that you must turn to God, if ever you would be approved by him. God said respecting Laodicea, "I would thou wert cold or hot: and because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Be not satisfied, then, with a lukewarm state: but give yourselves wholly to the Lord, and serve and glorify him with your whole hearts — — —]

[f] ver. 12.

OUTLINE NO. 1033

GOD'S INVITATION TO HIS PEOPLE.

Jer. iii. 12—15. *Go, and proclaim these words toward the north; and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

IF we would see the Divine character exhibited in the brightest possible colours, we need go no further than to the passage before us, with the preceding and following context. Let any one read the second and third chapters, with the two first verses of the fourth chapter, and he will be perfectly amazed at the condescension and kindness of God; who, having expostulated with the Jews on account of their multiplied transgressions, urges them, by every argument that

can be devised, to give up themselves unto him: and when no consideration that he can offer appears to affect them, he determines to take to him his great power, and, by an act of sovereign and Almighty grace, to constrain them to return unto him: "Thou *shalt* call me, My Father; and *shalt* not turn away from me[a]." In this way he prevails over them: Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God[b]." No sooner does God behold this purpose formed in the minds of his rebellious people, than he says, "If thou wilt return, O Israel, return unto me." But I shall confine myself to the passage which I have read; which is, in fact, an epitome of the whole: and I shall consider it,

I. As addressed to God's ancient people—

They are here addressed as a "backsliding" people—

[This is a metaphor taken from oxen, which refuse to draw in the yoke that is put upon them[c]. God had taken them to him as his people, and nourished them for his own; but they rebelled against him, and would never execute his commands[d].]

Yet he sends to them messages of mercy, and not of judgment—

["Go," says he to his chosen servants, "go, and proclaim to them these words; Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord." Well might he have cast them off utterly. But he delighteth in mercy, and "willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live." By many prophets did he thus invite them to return[e], whilst they even "wearied him" with their obstinacy[f].]

One thing only he requires; namely, that they shall humble themselves before him—

["Only acknowledge thine iniquity." This was indispensable. God could not, consistently with his own honour, receive them, whilst they continued to harden themselves in their wickedness. They must call to mind their offences, which had been of such enormous magnitude: they must spread them before the Lord with penitential sorrow, and implore mercy at his hands. This was all that God expected of them. To compensate for their wickedness was impossible; but to confess it, and to humble themselves on account of it,

[a] ver. 19. [b] ver. 22. [c] Hos. iv. 16.
[d] Isai. i. 2, 3. [e] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15. [f] Isai. xliii. 24.

was necessary, before they could hope for pardon from their God.]

To prevail upon them, he urges the most affecting considerations:

1. The merciful disposition which, notwithstanding their iniquities, he felt towards them—

[God is indeed slow to anger, and "rich in mercy to all who call upon him." When he proclaimed his name to Moses, this was the attribute by which he was to be chiefly known; "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin[g]." Indeed this is the argument by which men are influenced, far more than by the terrors of God's avenging wrath. These, though proper to be urged in their place, operate for the most part, like the storm which makes the traveller wrap his cloak the more closely round him; whereas mercy, like the sun, penetrates with a kindly and genial influence, and induces him willingly, and of his own accord, to cast it from him. By this, therefore, does God chiefly endeavour to reclaim his obstinately offending people.]

2. The relation under which, notwithstanding their departure from him, he still regarded them—

[He often calls himself "the Husband" of his ancient people[h]. And here he urges that relation as an inducement to them to comply with his merciful and gracious invitations. Amongst men, such transgressions as God's people had committed must have issued in an irreversible divorce: but with God no such impediment existed: he could, consistently with his own honour, re-admit them to his embrace; and he declares himself willing and desirous to restore them to all the privileges and blessings of a most beloved spouse.]

3. The benefits which he was still ready to confer upon them—

[They, like sheep, had gone astray from him; and he sought them out with all diligence: and if the whole flock would return unto him, most gladly would he receive them all[i]. But if only a small remnant of them would return; if only "one of a city, and two of a *tribe*," would come; he would not, on that account, reject them. On the contrary, he would appoint over them "pastors, according to his heart, who should feed them with knowledge and understanding[k]."

[g] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [h] Isai. liv. 5. Jer. xxxi. 32. Hos. ii. 19, 20.
[i] Ezek. xxxiv. 12—14. [k] Jer. xxiii. 3, 4.

Now this, I conceive, marks particularly the aspect which this passage has on the future restoration of the Jews: for not only is Israel here united with Judah (which shews that the passage was *not fully accomplished* at their return from Babylon), but there were not, previous to our Lord's advent, nor have there been at any time since, to *the Jewish nation at large*, any such stated pastors appointed as exist in the Christian Church: but, so far as they have returned to God through Christ, so far has this benefit been accorded to them: and so far as they shall yet be brought to Christ, they shall live in the enjoyment of it, and possess all the blessings that result from a stated and faithful ministry.]

Thus does God, by all these kind and affecting arguments, urge his ancient people to return unto him—

But the passage may also be considered,

II. As addressed to ourselves at this day—

Blameable as it is to overlook God's ancient people in their own prophecies, or to pass them over as not deserving our attention, it would be still more blameable so to limit the prophecies to former ages, as to overlook their aspect on the Christian Church, and the still fuller accomplishment which they shall receive in the latter-day. The passage before us may doubtless be properly applied to us as well as to the Jews: for to us pertain,

1. The same duties—

[We have been "a backsliding people." Who amongst us is not conscious that he has not put forth his strength in the service of his God? Our Lord has told us, that "his yoke is easy, and his burthen is light:" yet who amongst us has delighted to fulfil his will, and execute his commands? Say, Brethren, whether, instead of devoting yourselves wholly to the Lord, and living altogether for him, ye have not in many things transgressed against him, and manifested an insuperable reluctance to that holy and heavenly course which he has prescribed? — — —

To you, then, as God's servant, I come; and, as commissioned by him, I "proclaim, in his sacred name, Return," and yield up yourselves unfeignedly to him. Indeed ye *must* "return," if ever ye would obtain mercy at his hands. Yes, ye must return in a way of penitential sorrow, confessing your sins, and humbling yourselves before him. Nor is it in a way of *general* humiliation only, but of *particular* confession. Many

are the sins which all of us have committed; many which, though unknown to man, are known to God, and recorded against us in the book of his remembrance. He has seen us, when lying upon our bed: the darkness has been no darkness with him: he has seen the inmost recesses of our hearts, and has beheld our every thought and every desire. But, whether we have committed more flagrant transgressions or not, this is clear and undeniable, that "we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God." If we try ourselves by the requirements of his Law and of his Gospel, we shall see that, in instances without number, "we have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" and, under a sense of our defects, we must abase ourselves before him, even as holy Job did, in dust and ashes — — —]

2. The same encouragements—

To us does God send the same gracious invitations—

[To us, as well as to his ancient people, is he *rich in mercy*, and ready to forgive. Not one of us would he reject, if only we would come to him in his Son's name[l]. No, Brethren, "his anger should not fall upon you," even though your transgressions may have been ever so great, or ever so long continued in: on the contrary, he would act towards you the part of the father in the parable; and would, upon the very first approach of your hearts towards him, "run to meet you, and fall on your neck and kiss you, and clothe you in the best robe and kill the fatted calf, and make merry with you" — — —

And does he not stand in the relation of a husband to you? Yes, he does; and will still recognise you as his spouse, notwithstanding all your past unfaithfulness. You remember that our blessed Lord is frequently called "the Bridegroom" of his Church[m]. St. Paul, when apparently setting forth the duties of husband and wife, declares that, in reality, "he spake of Christ and his Church[n]." Now, under this relation, does he desire to receive you, notwithstanding all that you have done amiss. I wish that every one of you could realize this figure. Conceive of a woman who had departed from her husband, and greatly dishonoured him by the most licentious habits. Suppose a friend of her husband commissioned to seek for her, and to inform her, with all imaginable tenderness, that her husband was willing to receive her again; that he would freely pardon all her misconduct, and never upbraid her with it even to his dying hour. What would be the feelings of a woman under those circumstances, especially if she was not wholly abandoned to her evil ways? Now such I would wish to be the

[l] John vi. 37. [m] Matt. ix. 15. John iii. 29. Rev. xxi. 2, 9.
[n] Eph. v. 32.

feelings of every one amongst you, and such the interest in the message now delivered to you. I pray you, Brethren, consider this as the very case with you; and let the advice which you yourselves would give to a woman so circumstanced, be that which you will carry into effect on the present occasion — — —

With all needful benefits, too, shall you be loaded. What can a straying sheep need more, than to be brought in safety to the fold, and to be put under the care of a faithful shepherd that will supply its every want? Such are the benefits that shall be accorded to you. What, though there should be only "one or two" of you so disposed? Shall you, therefore, be disregarded by your God? No: your heavenly Shepherd will take you up in his arms, and "carry you home on his shoulders, rejoicing:" and he will appoint over you "pastors, according to his heart, to feed you with knowledge and understanding." The benefit of a faithful ministry is by no means justly appreciated by the world at large. But to those who have been "brought home to Zion," it is a mercy of inestimable value. Greatly does a stated ministry, where the pastor is really after God's heart, tend to the edification and comfort of God's faithful people; and you, Beloved, if you will truly return to God, shall find that the word preached to you from time to time shall "accomplish in you all the good pleasure of his goodness;" and prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls" — — —]

Coming now back to the subject as first proposed, I would SAY unto you,

1. Be like-minded with God, in reference to his ancient people—

[See what tender regard God shewed towards them in the days of old: and the same anxiety does he still express for their welfare: for, as I have before observed, the message sent to them has respect to a period yet future, when they shall assuredly obey the call delivered to them. And if God, who has been so greatly offended by them, and whose only dear Son "they slew, and hanged on a tree;" if He, I say, yet regards them with such tender compassion, what ought ye to do, whom they have never offended, and who are in the same condemnation with them? In truth, the command of God is given to you, and to all who have access to them in their present dispersion: "Go, and proclaim to them" the mercy of their God: go, and invite them, by every tender consideration that is proposed to them in the inspired volume: and if ye say, 'I cannot hope to prevail upon them;' let it suffice if you can prevail on "one of a city, and two of a whole tribe." You are not taught at first to expect the conversion of the whole

nation; you are told only to look for them as "the gleanings of an olive-tree, two or three upon the top of the uppermost bough, four or five on the outmost fruitful branches thereof[o]." And if that satisfy God, shall it not satisfy you? Will ye not endeavour to get in the first-fruits, because ye are not yet privileged to reap the whole harvest? I say then, have compassion on them in their low estate: or, if ye have no pity for them, at least perform the office which is here assigned to you, of bringing back to Jehovah the wife that has forsaken him, and whom he desires to restore to all her former honour and felicity — — — If ye say, 'We cannot get access to them, to deliver these gracious tidings;' let not that be any excuse for your indifference: for there are many who are at this moment employed in this very office; and if you exercise liberality to send them forth, there will be many others who will gladly go to them, and proclaim to them according to the message which is here put in their mouth. Too long have the Christian world neglected this duty: I pray you, arise to the discharge of it: and know, for your comfort, that the efforts already made, have prevailed to the full extent of the encouragement here afforded us — — —]

2. Be examples to them of all that you require at their hands—

[Do you bid *them* "return?" Let them see that *you* have returned, in deed and in truth, to the very bosom of your God. Do you bid them "acknowledge their iniquity?" Let them see you walking humbly with God; and "sowing daily in tears," that you may be privileged at last to "reap in joy." Above all, be ye as a wife that has returned to her husband. There is not an image in the world that so fitly marks the Christian's state as this. It may be thought that the conduct of a loving and obedient wife, who lives only for her husband, is a proper pattern for a Christian towards his God and Saviour: but, lovely as that is, it comes far short of the Christian's spirit: for, superadded to all the love and fidelity of a duteous wife, there must be in that *a continual sense of all our past unfaithfulness.* A wife so restored, would never for a moment forget what she had been, and what she had done, whilst separated from her husband: and every act of love on his part would only fill her with deeper self-lothing and self-abhorrence, for having ever so dishonoured one who deserved such different conduct at her hands. Now, get into this spirit; never exalting yourselves above the poor fallen Jew, or above the vilest of the human race. This is the walk that is most pleasing to God. This is the walk that will be ever

[o] Isai. xvii. 6.

accompanied with the most earnest efforts to honour God, and will lead to the highest possible attainments in every grace. So make your light to shine before them, and they will see and know that "God is with you of a truth."]

OUTLINE NO. 1034

THE TRUE SOURCE OF SALVATION.

Jer. iii. 19. *I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from me.*

IN many parts of the inspired volume, God is pleased to speak of himself after the manner of men; as though he were on some occasions reduced, as it were, to extremities, and at a loss how to act. Thus, by the prophet Hosea, he expresses himself as almost necessitated to cast off his people for their wickedness, but yet as not knowing how to bring his mind to execute on them so severe a judgment: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim," even as those ill-fated cities that were destroyed together with Sodom and Gomorrha[a]? So, on the other hand, by Jeremiah, he speaks as equally at a loss how to exercise towards them the mercy which he was inclined to bestow: "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?"

This, however applicable to the people amongst whom the prophet ministered, had, beyond all doubt, a reference to a period yet future, even to events that should take place in the latter day. Then will "the ark of the covenant," that bright symbol of the Divine presence, be altogether forgotten by the Jews, and all the worship connected with it be utterly renounced; the people being desirous only to "worship God in spirit and in truth." At that period they will have ceased to "walk after the imagination of their

[a] Hos. xi. 8.

own evil heart;" and the ten tribes of Israel will partake with Judah in all the blessings accorded to them[b]. Hitherto these events have never occurred. But the time is fast approaching, when, in every particular they shall be fulfilled. True, it appears almost impossible that they should be realized: but God here declares, that they shall be accomplished in their season. In confirmation of this promise, I will shew,

I. How the obstructions to the restoration of the Jews shall be surmounted—

God himself appeals to them upon this very subject: "How shall I put thee among the children?"

[From the very beginning the Jews were a stiff-necked people. It was only for his own name sake that God did not again and again destroy them in the wilderness; and on many occasions also, after their establishment in the promised land. At last, God could no longer forbear: and therefore he gave up the ten tribes into the hands of the Assyrians, and the other two tribes into the hands of the Chaldeans. And after their restoration from Babylon, they still remained the same rebellious people, in every thing like their forefathers, except idolatry: and at last they filled up the measure of their iniquity in the murder of their Messiah. For all this wickedness they have now been scattered, these eighteen hundred years, over the face of the earth; and they are still as obdurate as ever. How, then, shall they be restored to the favour of their God? — — — The extent of their wickedness forbids it; and the honour of God, as the Moral Governor of the Universe, forbids it. Suppose an earthly prince were to select, for his attendants and most favoured servants, multitudes who had been long in rebellion against him, and had murdered his only dear Son, whom he had sent, not in a way of vindictive wrath, but in a way of love and mercy, to bring them back to their allegiance: suppose such an act of grace as this: What would be thought concerning it? Would not other potentates be ready to say, that it was an encouragement to all subjects to rebel against their governors, and to commit the greatest possible excesses? Would it not appear an excess of generosity, subversive of all moral government? If then amongst men, whose rights are so limited, this would be judged so replete with danger, how should it be that the great and glorious God should so relinquish all his own rights, and so requite those who have been the most forward to trample on them?]

[b] ver. 16—18.

But these obstacles, however formidable, shall be surmounted—

[God had before expressed his earnest desire for their restoration to him; "Wilt thou not at this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth[c]?" And now he determines to effect it by his own Almighty power: "Thou shalt call me My Father; and shalt not turn away from me." This will overcome every obstacle: for, "if God will work, who shall let it?" Vain was the resistance of Pharaoh: vain the obstructions of the sea, the wilderness, and the united nations of Canaan. As God spake the universe itself into existence, so will he, in his own appointed time, form that "new creation" to which my text refers, when "all the nations" (of Jews certainly, and possibly, in part, of Gentiles also) "shall be gathered to Jerusalem[d];" and, together with all the tribes both of Israel and Judah[e], become one fold under one Shepherd[f]."]

From hence we may see,

II. How alone the difficulties in the way of our salvation also can ever be overcome—

There are immense difficulties in the way of our salvation—

[The extent of our wickedness equals, and perhaps exceeds, that of the Jews. What evil was committed by them which does not also, to a fearful extent, obtain amongst us? — — — And if they crucified the Lord of Glory, have not we also "crucified him afresh[g]," by our neglect of his Gospel, and our contempt of his salvation? — — — The Jews of our Lord's day were more criminal than Tyre and Sidon; yea, and even than Sodom and Gomorrha; because they sinned against greater light than those idolatrous cities: and, when we reflect on the advantages which we enjoy, we have reason to fear that a still heavier condemnation will come on us, for our abuse of them — — — Indeed, it should seem almost impossible that a God of justice and holiness and truth should ever receive to his bosom those who have so "trodden under foot his dear Son, and done such despite to the Spirit of his grace[h] — — —]

But these shall be overcome, even as those which obstruct the restoration of the Jews—

[If we looked to ourselves only, our salvation would be altogether hopeless. But God directs us to look to Him, with

[c] ver. 4. [d] ver. 17. [e] ver. 18
[f] Ezek. xxxiv. 23. and John x. 16. with Isai. lxv. 17, 18.
[g] Heb. vi. 6. [h] Heb. x. 29.

whom nothing is impossible. He promises to interpose for us *in a way of sovereign grace*, and *by the exercise of his Almighty power*. His grace is his own: and he may dispense it to whomsoever he sees fit, according to the counsel of his own will. And he says, "Thou *shalt* call me, My Father;" and *shalt* participate all the blessings of my most favoured children — — — And he will, by the exercise of his Almighty power, effect this: for he has said, "Thou shalt not turn away from me;" that is, I will both restore thee to my favour, and keep thee, by my own power, unto everlasting salvation — — — Here, then, is our security; here is our hope. Nothing less than his merciful interposition can effect this work; and nothing shall ever be permitted to defeat his gracious purpose: "His counsel shall stand, and He will do all his will[1]."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who question the possibility of their own salvation—

[I do not wonder that any should feel doubts on this head, when God himself seems almost at a loss to find how he shall effect it. But view God as a God of uncontrollable sovereignty and irresistible power, and you may at once dismiss all your fears, if only you cry mightily to him, and put your trust in him — — —]

2. To those who have entertained no such fears—

[How awfully must Satan have blinded your eyes, and hardened your hearts! You think salvation easy to be attained, and almost a matter of course. But you will be of a very different mind, if ever you come to see the greatness of your guilt, and the inveteracy of your corruptions. I tell you, Brethren, that nothing but the blood of God's only dear Son could ever have atoned for your guilt; nor can any thing but the operation of the divine Spirit ever renew your depraved hearts: nor till you are made sensible of the difficulties of your salvation, will you have any well-grounded hope of being "numbered amongst the children of your God" — — —]

3. To those who profess to have been brought into the family of their God—

[You doubtless wish to be informed how you may "walk worthy of your high calling." To you then I say, Obey your God in the two particulars which he here requires. "Go to him, as your Father in Christ Jesus;" and "walk before him as dear children;" committing to him your every care, and expecting from him a supply of all your wants — — — And

[1] Isai. xlvi. 10.

let nothing prevail upon you to "turn away from him." Be ready to sacrifice every earthly consideration, and to lay down even life itself, for him. Under all circumstances, my advice to you is, "Be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: and you may then be assured, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

OUTLINE NO. 1035

INVITATION TO BACKSLIDERS.

Jer. iii. 22. *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God.*

THOUGH the conversion of men is the result of God's purpose, and solely the effect of his grace, yet it is wrought by rational means. He calls upon them as free agents, and enforces his exhortations with the most cogent motives. By these means he convinces their judgment, and makes them willing to comply with his solicitations. In the preceding context he had determined to effect his purpose by the constraining influence of his grace; nevertheless he does not omit the use of means, but repeats his former invitations with still stronger arguments than before. In this way he produces the change upon the reluctant soul, and makes it thankfully to embrace his proffered mercy.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider,

I. The Lord's address to the backsliders—

The persons addressed are either mere nominal Christians, or real Christians in a declining state—

[The term "backsliding" refers to an unruly heifer that either will not at all draw in its master's yoke, or that performs its work unsteadily[a]. *In the former view*, it comprehends all those who in name and profession are his, but in reality are altogether regardless of his will. Alas! how many are there of this description in every place! Who amongst us may not consider the text as addressed to himself in particular? Who

[a] Hos. iv. 16.

has not cast off the yoke of God, and said, like Pharaoh, "I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice?" *In the latter view*, it may describe those who, having begun to serve the Lord, turn back again in some measure to the world and to sin. And where is there a child of God who must not acknowledge himself to have been, at some time, of this number, however diligently he be serving God at this moment? Who can say that he has invariably, from the very first, pursued the path of duty in one uniform tenour of conduct? Who has not often been conscious of secret declensions, and "backslidings of heart?"]

To both these descriptions of people does God address an earnest and impressive exhortation—

[God well knows the danger to which all are exposed when they have turned aside from him. Nor does he "will, in any instance, the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return and live." Hence, instead of saying, as we might well expect, Depart from me, he invites us to return. He would have us not only to take his yoke upon us, but to draw in it with pleasure and delight. To enforce his exhortation, he adds a most encouraging promise. Well might he threaten us with the dreadful consequences of our transgression, and address himself only to our fears. But he is a God of infinite compassion, and would rather win us by love. Our backslidings have made a deadly wound in our souls, a wound which if not speedily closed, will destroy us for ever. Behold, what astonishing mercy! He promises to heal us: to heal the guilt of our sin by the blood of Jesus, and the power of it by his good Spirit! Such is his gracious declaration to us at this instant; and such is the encouragement which he affords to all who have departed from him.]

Having seen the condescension of God, we can be at no loss to determine,

II. The effect it should produce upon us—

If we have the smallest spark of ingenuousness within us, his goodness must of necessity produce,

1. A ready compliance with his will—

Such was the effect upon those addressed in the text. And, whenever the word is applied with power to our souls, the same effect will be visible on us. We shall no longer keep at a distance from God, but return to him with our whole hearts. Filled with astonishment at his forbearance towards us, and solicitous to experience the renewed expressions of his favour, we shall say, "Behold we come unto thee." No

pleasures of sin will be suffered to detain us from him. Having "tasted the gall and wormwood of a backslidden state, our souls will have them still in remembrance." We shall determine with the Church of old, "I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now[b]."

I call then on this whole assembly now to unite as with the voice of one man, saying, "Thou Lord art our God; and we come to thee" according to thy commandment; yea, "behold," and *bear witness to us* this day, "We come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God."]

2. An unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service—

[The love of Christ has a constraining power, which, if not irresistibly, yet invincibly, impels us to live unto him. Let it once be "shed abroad in our hearts," and we shall instantly exclaim with rapture, "My Lord, and my God." "What have I to do any more with idols," will be the natural effusion of our souls[c]. We shall feel a holy indignation at the thought of having so long "provoked the Lord to jealousy;" and shall address him in the language of his repenting people, "Other lords beside thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name[d]."]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who are deliberately resisting the will of God—

[While casting off the restraints of God's law, and following the dictates of your own will, you conceive yourselves to be enjoying perfect liberty. But such liberty is the sorest bondage[e]. A subjection to sin is a vassalage most abject in its nature, and most fatal in its consequences[f]. Would to God that the slaves of sin would reflect a moment what master they are serving, and what wages they are likely to receive! Soon would they then cast off the yoke which their own lusts have imposed, and seek for freedom in the service of their God. Awake, ye deluded sinners, and return to him, whose "yoke is easy, and whose burthen is light."]

2. To those who, having begun to serve God, are drawing back from him—

["Who hath bewitched," who hath infatuated, your depraved hearts? "Hath God been a wilderness to you," that you are tired of his service[g]? "Is there indeed no profit in serving him?" We will venture to put the matter to this

[b] Hos. ii. 7. [c] Hos. xiv. 8. [d] Isai. xxvi. 13.
[e] 2 Pet. ii. 19. [f] Rom. vi. 16. [g] Jer. ii. 5, 31.

issue. Are you as happy now in your departure from God, as you were when you were endeavouring to walk with him? Has your return to secret neglects and sinful indulgences been attended with a proportionate increase of peace and comfort? Sure we are, that none can truly affirm this to have been their experience. If your consciences be not altogether seared, your wounds are festering at this instant. Beware then lest God leave you to be "filled with your own ways[h]." That would be the greatest curse that can be inflicted on you. O return immediately to God; and he will heal your backslidings and love you freely[i].]

3. To those who are maintaining a steadfast walk with God—

[Thrice happy souls! ye are highly favoured of the Lord. Say, Have ye not already the recompence in your own bosoms? Is not his service perfect freedom? Be thankful then to God who enables you so to live. Be fearful of any thing which may "grieve that Holy Spirit, by whom ye are sealed." Watch against secret backslidings in their very first beginnings. Be more and more diligent in every good word and work. "Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and be assured that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

[h] Prov. xiv. 14. [i] Hos. xiv. 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1036

REPENTANCE THE MEANS OF PREVENTING RUIN.

Jer. iv. 3, 4. *Thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

THE language of the prophets is highly figurative, and therefore sometimes difficult to be understood; but, when judiciously explained, it will always be found highly instructive. Of course, it will not be right to press a metaphorical expression too far; nor should an idea that may seem indelicate, be so touched as to offend the nicest ear[a]: but, when the general import of the metaphor is seen, the subject contained in it may be prosecuted to great advantage. It is

[a] This hint should be very strictly attended to, in preaching on such a text as this.

obvious that some very important instruction is conveyed in the passage before us: and it will be found no less applicable to ourselves than to the Jews of old, if we consider,

I. The duties here enjoined—

These are set forth under two different images; the one taken from breaking up fallow ground, and the other from the Jewish rite of circumcision. To ascertain the import of those images, we need only refer to a parallel passage in the Prophet Ezekiel, where the same duties are inculcated in plain and simple terms; "Repent and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[b]." Two duties then are here enjoined;

1. Repentance—

[The heart of man by nature may justly be compared with uncultivated ground that is covered with thorns and briers: for it is obdurate, and altogether unfit for the reception of any good seed, till it has been "broken up," and cleared of its noxious products. Let any one examine his own heart, and he will find this representation true. As to the outward acts of men, there certainly is a great difference, yea, and in their inward dispositions too; but in respect of love to God and delight in his service, all are on the same level; "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[c]." It is full of "earthly, sensual, devilish" affections, which must be rooted up, before the graces of God's Spirit can grow within it. But this cannot be done by a slight and superficial work: the plough must enter into the very soul, as it did on the day of Pentecost: we must be made to feel our desert and danger, and be brought to the condition of the poor repenting publican[d]. Let every child of man bear this in mind; for it is "the broken and contrite heart alone, which God will not despise;" and "except ye thus repent, ye must all inevitably perish."]

2. Amendment—

[Circumcision was not only "a seal" on God's part, marking Israel for his own peculiar people, but it was *a sign* also on the part of Israel, denoting their obligation to "put off the body of the sins of the flesh[e]," and to love and serve God with all their hearts[f]. In this sense, though the rite itself is superseded by Baptism, the *term* may justly be applied to us.

[b] Ezek. xviii. 30. [c] Rom. viii. 7. [d] Luke xviii. 13.
[e] Col. ii. 11. [f] Deut. xxx. 6.

We must have "our hearts circumcised unto the Lord:" we must "mortify our earthly members[g]," and "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts[h]." Whatever pain it may occasion us to part with "our besetting sins," (for circumcision was a painful rite,) it must be submitted to, even as a man gladly parts with a diseased member for the preservation of his whole body. Our blessed Lord assures us, that if we wilfully retain *one* bosom lust, we must perish in that "fire that never shall be quenched[i]."]

This awful truth being so strongly marked in our text, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The connexion between these duties and the Divine favour—

In its primary sense, the threatening in our text may be considered as denouncing temporal judgments on the Jewish nation: but it must also be understood in reference to those eternal judgments which we all have merited by our iniquities. For the averting of those judgments, repentance and amendment are indispensably necessary:

1. *Not*, however, in a way of *meritorious efficiency*—

[It is not possible for man to merit any thing at God's hands. As transgressors of his law, we are justly exposed to his everlasting displeasure[k]: and, if we could perfectly obey his law in future, our obedience would no more cancel our obligation to punishment for past disobedience, than our future abstinence from incurring debts would discharge the debts already incurred. But the truth is, that every thing we do is imperfect, and needs forgiveness on account of its imperfection: and therefore to dream of meriting pardon by deeds which themselves stand in need of pardon, must be folly in the extreme. There is but one way of obtaining deliverance from the punishment of sin, and that is through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is his meritorious sacrifice which alone expiates the guilt of sin: and, if we look to any thing else, either in whole or in part, for pardon and acceptance, we effectually cut ourselves off from all hope of his salvation. However we may "plough up the fallow ground, and sow in righteousness, we must reap *in mercy*," and in *mercy alone*[l]. Salvation is altogether of grace, through faith[m]: and *in point of dependence*, we must renounce our best actions as much as our vilest sins.]

[g] Col. iii. 5. Gal. v. 24. [h] Eph. iv. 22. [i] Mark ix. 43—48.
[k] Rom. iii. 19. [l] Hos. x. 12. [m] Eph. ii. 8, 9.

2. But in a way of *suitable preparation*—

[Repentance and amendment are necessary both to *an honourable exercise of mercy on God's part*, and to *a becoming reception of mercy on our part.*

If God were not to require humiliation in us, and a mortification of our sins, what evidence would there be that He is holy; and in what light would he appear as the Moral Governor of the Universe? Surely he would be thought indifferent about the honour of his law, and regardless of the moral character of his creatures. But he will not so dishonour his own perfections: and therefore, even when most anxious to display his mercy, he requires an acknowledgment of sin on our part[n], and declares, that, if we will not humble ourselves before him, he will proceed against us with deserved rigour[o].

But if we could conceive that God should pardon an unrepenting sinner, the sinner himself would not value a pardon so offered: he would rather think it an insult than a favour: for, whilst he is unconscious that he deserves the wrath of God, he would account it an injustice even to be supposed to merit it. Again, suppose the pardon actually conferred, what gratitude would he feel for the gift bestowed? or what endeavours would he make to glorify God in future? Would he not account sin a light matter? Would he not readily return to it, even "as a dog to his vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire?" We may ask once more; supposing him forgiven, how could he join in the songs of the redeemed above? They are prostrating themselves with profoundest adoration before the throne of God, and singing praises incessantly "to Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood:" but *he* has no heart for such exercises: instead of magnifying his God and Saviour for the greatness of his mercy towards him, he would be congratulating himself that he had never merited any other portion.

Here then the connexion between these duties and our forgiveness is manifest: it is founded, not in any vain ideas of merit, but in the immutable decrees of God: God cannot dishonour himself; nor can man be saved in any other way, than by "confessing and forsaking his iniquities[p]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet been awakened to a sense of their sins—

[Alas! how many amongst us are yet "uncircumcised in heart and ears?" How many have never yet wept and mourned in secret for their sins, and never adopted the resolution of the Prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father." But God forbid

[n] Jer. iii. 12, 13. [o] Jer. ii. 35. [p] Prov. xxviii. 13.

that they should continue any longer in such fatal security. Hear, every one of you, the command of God: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up[q]." This, this is the great business of life: in comparison of this, every pursuit is light and vain. "To flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life!" O who can paint in sufficiently glowing colours the importance and excellency of such an employment?

Some may perhaps reply, that they cannot do these things. True, we cannot of ourselves; but will not God enable us to do them, if we seek the aid of his Holy Spirit? Has he not expressly told us, that his "grace shall be sufficient for us?" I say then, "Plough up your fallow ground;" "make you a new heart, and a new spirit:" and when you find your own insufficiency, then plead with God the promises he has made, and cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me[r]!" That prayer, if offered in faith, shall surely be answered; and you shall find to your joy, that you "can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you."]

2. Those who make a profession of religion—

[Do not imagine that it is sufficient to break up the fallow ground *once:* the husbandman ploughs his ground often, especially if it be a soil that is full of noxious plants. Thus then must you do: there is no soil so bad as the heart of a carnal man: weeds are growing up continually: and it must be the labour of your life to pluck them up. How many professors of religion have the good seed choked and rendered unfruitful, through their negligence in pulling up the thorns and briers that grow up with it[s]! It is an awful truth, that no people are farther from the kingdom of God than they; because they are of all persons the most difficult to be brought to a sense of their danger. But St. Paul marks in very striking terms the difference between such persons and the true Christian: against those he cautions us, "Beware of dogs, beware of *the concision:* WE are *the circumcision,* who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh[t]." A profession of religion, however clear your knowledge of the Gospel may be, will not suffice: for "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God[u]."]

[q] Jam. iv. 9, 10.

[r] Compare the command, Ezek. xviii. 31. with the promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. and the petition, Ps. li. 10.

[s] Matt. xiii. 7, 22. [t] Phil. iii. 2, 3 [u] Rom. ii. 25—29.

OUTLINE NO. 1037

IMPORTANCE OF SUPPRESSING VAIN THOUGHTS.

Jer. iv. 14. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*

THE displeasure of God is never raised to such a height, but that he is willing to pardon his offending creatures, and longs for their repentance on purpose that he may exercise his mercy towards them. The denunciations of his wrath do indeed frequently appear as if they could not be reversed: but they always, even when most positive, imply a condition, and leave room for hope. The approaching destruction of Nineveh was foretold by the prophet in terms which seemed to preclude a possibility of their escape: but their penitence averted the impending storm. Thus, in the chapter before us, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans is spoken of as hastening with the velocity of an eagle, insomuch that the prophet complains of it as already accomplished: "Woe unto us! for we are spoiled:" yet in the very next words he introduces, as in a parenthesis, a brief and pathetic exhortation to repentance, as the sure and only means of staying the Divine judgments.

It should seem that, in the midst of all their wickedness, the Jews buoyed up themselves with expectations that the threatened calamities would never come. In reference to these vain hopes the prophet addresses them in the words which we have just read. In these words we see that God notices the "vain thoughts," as well as the sinful actions, of men; and that he requires "*the heart*" to be purified from *those*, as well as *the life* from *these*.

We shall take occasion therefore from the text to shew,

I. What are those vain thoughts which are apt to lodge within us—

Of course it will not be possible to notice all the vain thoughts that rush into the minds of men; (we

might as well attempt to number the sands upon the sea shore:) we must content ourselves with mentioning a few, which deserve more particular attention.

St. Paul speaks of a "filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit:" agreeably to which distinction we may arrange our thoughts under two heads;

1. Spiritual—

[There are many "vain thoughts," which, on account of their having their seat and empire in the mind only, may be called spiritual; but which are peculiarly hateful to God.

What *proud* thoughts are apt to infest the mind! It is no small complacency which people feel in the beauty of their persons, the elegance of their dress, the dignity of their titles, or the extent and variety of their intellectual acquirements. Even in reference to religion itself, how common is it to behold men puffed up with vain conceit, imagining themselves *wise*, when they are "born like a wild ass's colt;" and *good*, when they are "enemies to God by wicked works!"

Unbelieving thoughts also are ever ready to arise. Indeed, these almost universally prevail. Whence is it that men are so secure, so easy in their sins? Whence is it that all the promises and threatenings of the Gospel have so little weight? Is it not from the secret thought that God's word shall never be fulfilled, and that, however they may live, they shall have peace at the last? And are not such thoughts peculiarly displeasing to God[a]?

Amongst the most sinful thoughts that can occupy the mind, are those which are *vindictive:* yet how apt are they to rankle in the breast! What a tumult will they excite within us, agitating our frame, and instigating us to the most bitter invectives, hasty purposes, and violent proceedings! It is well for mankind that all are not equally susceptible of these impressions; but there are few, if any, who have not found them, on some occasions, disturbing their own peace, and operating to the destruction of Christian charity. Nothing can more strongly mark the impiety of such thoughts than God's express declaration, that he himself will never forgive any person that entertains them in his heart[b].]

2. Carnal—

[Amongst carnal thoughts we number those which relate either to the world or to the flesh.

The world tempts us principally to *anxious*, *covetous*, or *ambitious* thoughts. To these all are more or less exposed: the statesman, the warrior, the merchant, the mechanic, yea,

[a] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [b] Matt. xviii. 35

all orders and degrees of men, are impelled or distracted by them. Doubtless, it is the duty of every man to attend to the proper business of his calling: but when his mind is so occupied with earthly things as that he can find no delight in these which are heavenly, he is sinning against God, who would have him without carefulness[c], and commands him to "set his affections on things above, and not on things below[d]."

It is scarcely needful to mention, that amongst the vainest thoughts which find a lodgment within us, are those which are *impure*. It is surprising with what violence these will sometimes assault the soul; how they will haunt it by night and by day; how they will intrude even into the holiest places, and interrupt our holiest services. Nor can we doubt in what light they are to be regarded, when God himself has declared an unchaste look to be the same in his sight as actual adultery[e].]

Not to enumerate any more vain thoughts, we shall rather proceed to shew,

II. The necessity of cleansing ourselves from them—

We cannot cleanse ourselves from the guilt which we have already contracted, unless we wash in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." Nor can we purify ourselves from the pollution of sin, unless the Holy Ghost work effectually in us[f]. Yet this does not supersede the use of means; for when the text exhorts us to "wash our hearts from wickedness," it implies that,

1. It *may* be done—

[Though the power is certainly of God, yet there is much to be done by us: we should *maintain a sense of God's presence with us*. If the eye of a fellow-creature, even of a child, were upon us, we should be deterred by it from the commission of many sins: how then should we be restrained from evil thoughts, if we felt a consciousness that God was privy to every imagination of our hearts!

We should *guard against the occasions of sin*. All our senses and faculties are inlets to sin, or instruments whereby we commit it. All our intercourse with each other gives occasion to evil, if we be not much on our guard against it. We may, by flattering, or worldly, or light conversation, or

[c] 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6. Matt. vi. 25—34.
[d] Col. iii. 2. [e] Matt. v. 28.
[f] To this effect we pray that "God would cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit."

even by imparting to each other the workings of our hearts, stir up unhallowed passions, and suggest thoughts that may be exceedingly injurious to the soul. We should "set a watch before the door of our mouths," and even "make a covenant with our eyes," in order to shut out evil from our own hearts, and keep from exciting it in the hearts of others.

We should *frequently meditate upon the Holy Scriptures.* David found this a good antidote to evil thoughts[g]. The Scriptures have in themselves an efficacy to purify the heart, when they are applied to us by the powerful energy of the Holy Ghost[h]: besides which, the more we are filled with holy thoughts, the less room will be left for the intrusion of evil[i]. Being intent on the promises of God, we shall more easily cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit[k].

Lastly, we should "*diligently keep our hearts*[l]." The heart is the womb in which all evils are generated[m]; and we must watch all its motions, if we would keep it pure. The very instant any evil arises there, we must expel it: if we cannot prevent its entrance, we must take care it do not "*lodge* within us."]

2. It *must* be done—

[*God notices our thoughts* as much as he does our actions[n]; and *he considers them as characterizing our state before him.* "As we think in our hearts, so are we[o];" we are either hypocritical and vile, or pure and holy, according as we indulge, or abhor, the hidden abominations of our hearts.

Thoughts as really lead to death as actions themselves do[p]: and *they may be so evil in the sight of God as to render it doubtful whether they shall ever be forgiven*[q]. They must therefore be repented of as much as actions[r]: and, if they be not repented of, they will inevitably exclude us from the kingdom of heaven. This is strongly intimated in the text, since *the mortifying of them is declared to be necessary to salvation:* and the same awful truth is taught by our Lord himself, who represents the pure in heart "as the only persons who shall see God[s]."

The very manner in which God addresses us in the text, is a very striking proof of the necessity which lies upon us to subdue the evil workings of our hearts. Wherefore is all this *tenderness in the exhortation,* but because God, who willeth

g Ps. cxix. 113. h 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. i See Luke xi. 24—26.
k 2 Cor. vii. 1. l Prov. iv. 23. m Matt. xv. 19.
n Ps. l. 21. Ezek. xi. 5. o Prov. xxiii. 7. with Matt. xii. 35.
p Jam. i. 15. q Acts viii. 22. r Acts viii. 22.
s Matt. v. 8.

not the death of a sinner, sees the fatal tendency of our evil thoughts? And wherefore this kind *impatience in the reproof*, but because he sees that the evil, if indulged, will grow upon us; and that, if not speedily suppressed, it will terminate in our ruin?

Tenderly then would we exhort you all to mark the secret motions of your hearts. In respect of *actions*, many of you, no doubt, are virtuous, and, to a certain degree, blameless. But if you will call to mind the "vain *thoughts*" that have lodged within you, you will find abundant reason to blush, and be confounded before God in dust and ashes[t]. You will see that you need the blood of Christ to cleanse you from guilt, and the Spirit of Christ to create in you a new heart, as much as the most abandoned wretch on earth: and that, unless you set yourselves in earnest to "cleanse your hands, and purify your hearts[u]," there can be no salvation for you.

Say, Beloved, when will you begin this necessary work? With a holy impatience we would urge you to begin it instantly; lest, while you are purposing amendment, you be summoned unprepared to meet your God in judgment[x].]

[t] Ps. xix. 12. Prov. xx. 9. [u] Jam. iv. 8. [x] Isai. lv. 7.

OUTLINE NO. 1038

THE MISERIES OF WAR.

Jer. iv. 19. *My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me: I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.*

THE propriety of setting apart days for national humiliation is questioned by none, except those who despise all religion, or those whose extravagant principles of liberty lead them to set at nought all human authorities. The most pious of the Jewish kings endeavoured to unite their subjects in prayer and supplication, as the best means of averting the judgments which they either felt or feared: and even heathen monarchs have resorted to it, as that which their own consciences taught them was the most likely way to obtain favour with the Most High. We have reason to be thankful that this nation is now called in the most solemn manner to humble itself before God, and to implore help from him under its

present difficulties: and happy would it be for us, if the people at large laid to heart, as they ought, the calamities which we suffer, or the sins which have brought them upon us!

In the words before us, we may see what ought to be our *feelings* on this occasion[a], and what our *conduct*.

I. What should be our feelings—

That we may estimate aright the feelings which a state of warfare requires, let us view it,

1. As a calamity endured—

[Those who are at a distance from the scene of war, and hear of it only by battles gained or lost, are apt to overlook the miseries of their fellow-creatures, and to think of nothing but the general effects which the events may have on their national aggrandisement. But if we would form a correct judgment of this matter, let us endeavour to realize the horrors of war. Let us think of a hostile army now in our neighbourhood, and marching to attack the very place wherein we live. How would fear seize hold upon us, and "all faces gather blackness!" Read the menacing descriptions given of an advancing army by the Prophets Ezekiel[b] and Joel[c]: think, from the first tidings of their approach, till you behold them just ready to spread desolation and slaughter all around them; think, I say, what your feelings would be: does the prophet exaggerate, when he compares them to the pangs of a woman travailing with her first-born child[d]? See your dearest relatives weltering in their blood; your houses spoiled; the objects of your tenderest affection treated with the most shocking indignities; and you yourselves driven, without food, without raiment, to wander in the open fields, till your exhausted nature sinks under its accumulated woes. Well may we tremble at the bare possibility of such events. Reflect, then, on a whole kingdom thus desolated; the hostile armies carrying fire and sword through all the towns and villages of a populous country; "A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: yea, and nothing doth escape them:" "What a day of darkness and of gloominess" must that be to the people visited with such awful calamities[e]! Say, then, Brethren, what your feelings should be at this time! What if these scenes have not been acted before our eyes; are they the less to be deplored? And who can tell how soon they may be brought

[a] Fast-Day in 1809. [b] Ezek. xxi. 8—17. [c] Joel. ii. 4—11.
[d] ver. 29, 31. [e] Joel ii. 1—3.

home to our own doors! We entreat you, then, to lay these things to heart, and no longer to indulge a stupid insensibility to the calamities of war.]

2. As a judgment inflicted—

[War is one of God's "four sore judgments," wherewith he visiteth a guilty land. It is he who giveth the sword a charge against this or that country[f], and says, "Sword, pass through the land[g]." And as he stirred up enemies against Solomon[h], on purpose to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant[i], so it is on account of sin that he is now laying upon us his chastising rod[k] ——— Nor can we doubt but that his anger has waxed hot against us, when the judgments inflicted for our sins are so various and of so long continuance. See in what terms he describes his anger against the people of old[l]! and consider whether, when its effects are so visible on us, it be not high time for us to tremble. Yes, surely, the prophet's direction is exactly such as we are now called to follow[m]: and, if we refuse to follow it, we may well expect that our judgments will be multiplied, till they have wrought either our humiliation or destruction[n]. We must be stupid indeed if we do not see reason to "cry, when he is so binding us;" and to "humble ourselves under his mighty hand," when he is so correcting us.]

But it will be to little purpose to ascertain what our feelings should be, if we do not also consider,

II. What should be our conduct—

Let us make this inquiry, in reference,

1. To Ministers—

[The prophet tells us what was his conduct, to which indeed he was irresistibly impelled; "I cannot hold my peace." Ministers are watchmen, appointed by God himself to warn the people against his impending judgments. And while it is their duty to "weep between the porch and the altar," and to intercede with God to spare his heritage[o], and to "give him no rest" till he vouchsafe mercy to the land[p], it is also their duty to "lift up their voice as a trumpet, and to shew the house of Israel their sins." They must "cry aloud, and not spare[q]."

Let us not be thought harsh, if we execute our commission with fidelity and earnestness. You yourselves would be the first to condemn a sentinel who did not give you timely notice of an advancing enemy: and you will condemn us also in the

[f] Jer. xlvii. 6, 7. [g] Ezek. xiv. 17. [h] 1 Kings xi. 9, 14, 23, 26.
[i] Lev. xxvi. 25. [k] ver. 17, 18, 22. [l] Deut. xxxii. 23—25.
[m] ver. 8. [n] Lev. xxvi. 27, 28.
[o] Joel ii. 17. [p] Isai. lxii. 6, 7. [q] Isai. lviii. 1.

eternal world, if by "prophesying smooth things" we contribute to your ruin. We must, then, speak, "whether you will hear or whether you will forbear;" and must warn you, that nothing but present and eternal misery can be expected, whilst you continue impenitent in your sins[r] — — —]

2. To the people—

[Though the text does not particularly specify *your* duty, the context does, and warns you that an attention to it is the only means of quenching that wrath which is now flaming against you. The advice given you by the prophet may be comprised in three particulars: Seek to have your obstinate hearts softened — — — Put away the evils which have provoked God's displeasure against you — — — and, Get your hearts *thoroughly* renewed and sanctified by divine grace[s] — — —

We accuse not all as manifesting the same obduracy, or as loaded with the same degrees of guilt; but if all would search into their own hearts, they might find much impenitence and unbelief to mourn over, and much worldliness and carnality to put away: even those who make a profession of religion, if they would examine themselves closely as in the presence of God, might find many evil tempers and dispositions, which obstruct the efficacy of their prayers, and fearfully augment our national guilt. But if we turn not from our wickedness, it is in vain to hope that God will turn from his fiery indignation — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. The careless—

[This comprehends the great bulk of mankind. Whatever calamites are endured by others, they feel nothing, any farther than it immediately affects themselves. "When God's hand is lifted up, they will not see;" "nor when his judgments are in the earth, will they learn righteousness." But such indifference is most offensive to God: and they who indulge it are likely to become signal monuments of the Divine displeasure[t] — — —]

2. The self-confident—

[They who see not the hand of God against them are ever leaning on an arm of flesh: if they have failed in ever so many efforts, they still look no higher than to their own exertions for success. What their views are, and what the declarations of God respecting them[u], may be seen in the prophecies of

[r] Luke xiii. 3, 5.

[s] ver. 3, 4, 14. It will be easy to enlarge on the three points in reference to the words of the prophet.

[t] See Amos vi. 3—7. Zeph. i. 4, 6, 12, 13—18.

[u] Isai. ix. 8—17.

Isaiah. O that we may not thus provoke God to jealousy, and bring accumulated curses on our own heads, when we should be labouring by prayer and supplication to avert them[x]! ———]

3. The mourners—

[We hope there are some who possess a measure of Jeremiah's patriotism and piety, and who understand by experience his exclamations in the text, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart!" Would to God that we could see such a spirit universally prevailing! There would be no doubt then of a happy termination of our troubles. Such persons indeed are too generally considered as gloomy enthusiasts: but they are the best friends of their country: they are the people who "stand in the gap;" they are the few righteous, for whose sake our Sodom has not long since been destroyed. Go on, beloved, like Nehemiah, Daniel, and other holy men, bewailing your own sins, and the sins of this whole nation: and then, if you should not be so happy as to see your efforts successful in relation to the kingdom at large, you may be assured that your labour will not be lost as it respects your own souls: your prayer shall return into your own bosom; and your tears be had in remembrance before God[y].]

[x] Jer. xvii. 5—8. [y] Ezek. ix. 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1039

GOD'S BOUNTIES, AND OUR INGRATITUDE.

Jer. v. 23, 24. *This people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart. They are revolted and gone: neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.*

AS Ministers of the Gospel, our chief employment is to open to you the hidden mystery of Redemption, and to present for your acceptance "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Yet there are times and seasons when we must assume somewhat of the sterner aspect of the prophets; and, in the name of our Divine Master, address you in the language of reproof. The Jews, no doubt, were a stiff-necked people, and needed to be reproved in terms of the greatest severity. Would to God that we, under our more liberal

dispensation, were not obnoxious also to the same charge! But really, the commission given to the prophet is far from being unsuitable to us at this time, or improper to be executed towards you: "Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; who have eyes, and see not; who have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people have a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone: neither say they in their heart, Let us fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

In these words the prophet reproves the Jews,

I. For their contempt of God's authority—

They were indeed "a rebellious and gainsaying people[a]"—

[God had chosen them for his own peculiar people; and had given them his law, written with his own hand on tables of stone. But from the very beginning they were a rebellious people, casting off their allegiance to God, and revolting from him, to the service of "gods that could not profit nor deliver them." And though God called them to him by a succession of prophets, "they refused to return to him;" yea, "so bent were the whole nation to backslide from God, that none at all would exalt him[b]."]

And "what are we better than they[c]?"

[God has given to *us* also his Law. And who amongst us obeys it? Who desires to obey it? Who really, and in truth, endeavours to obey it? What, if we do not bow down to stocks and stones; do we not, in fact, "love and serve the creature more than the Creator," even as they did[d]? Who amongst us either abstains from any act, purely because it would displease God; or performs any act, purely from a desire to please him? I grant, we may abstain from many evils,

[a] Rom. x. 21. [b] Hos. xi. 5, 7. [c] Rom. iii. 9. [d] Rom. i. 25.

and perform many duties; but by what motive are we impelled? We shall find that our own gratification, or the approbation of man, has a far stronger influence on our minds than any consideration of God's favour; and that in "the spirit of our mind" we are as much revolted from God as ever the Jews themselves were — — —

But God has given to us his Gospel also, saying, Whatever contempt they have shewn to Moses and the prophets, "they will reverence my Son." But have we obeyed *his* voice, and "taken upon us his light and easy yoke?" No, indeed: we have been as regardless of Christ as if he had never come into the world. "We have indeed *called* him Lord; but we have not done the things which he has said[e]." Say, my Brethren, whether we have "fled to him for refuge," as the only Saviour of our souls? Say, whether we have surrendered up ourselves to him as his devoted followers, and made it the one labour of our lives to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his[f]?" Look at all around you, and see whether this be their state: and then look within, and let conscience tell you whether it be your own state: and, if it be not, then is the reproof in my text merited by you, far more than by the Jews themselves; inasmuch as you sin against greater light, and far richer mercies than they.]

God was ever endeavouring to reclaim his people: yet did his mercies only serve to mark their ingratitude, and bring reproof upon them,

II. For their insensibility to his love—

Not all the mercies vouchsafed unto them could bring them to a better mind—

[God had promised them a supply of all temporal blessings, if they would serve him with diligence and fidelity. And notwithstanding they violated their obligations continually, he still imparted to them the blessings they had so justly forfeited, sending them rain and fruitful seasons, as if they had not offended him at all. And what did he expect in return for these mercies? He doubtless expected, that, from a sense of gratitude for such unmerited kindness, they would reform their lives, and devote themselves to his service. But, behold, they still continued their disobedience; and "none of them said in their hearts, Let us fear the Lord our God, who has done such great things for us." This was a great aggravation of their guilt, and could not fail to bring down upon them God's heavy displeasure — — —]

[e] Luke vi. 46. [f] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

And what effect, let me ask have God's mercies produced on us?

[Behold, in his mercy he has now "sent us RAIN[g]," which we so greatly needed, and has given us a prospect of a "HARVEST;" when, if the drought had continued much longer, we should have been reduced to a state of extreme scarcity or famine. And what does God expect at our hands, but that we say one to another, Let us now fear the Lord our God, who has vouchsafed to us this seasonable relief[h]? Surely this is not more than the occasion calls for. But is this the way in which we are now requiting God for his mercies? Is this the feeling of men in general? Has it been the feeling of our own hearts? Have we humbled ourselves before him? and has "the goodness of our God led us to repentance[i]?" — — —

But what shall I say, if I put the question in reference to spiritual blessings? God has given to us, not merely "the bread that perisheth, but that also which endureth unto everlasting life." And not only has he sent us rain to refresh and fructify the parched ground, but he has sent us also his Holy Spirit, to revive and fertilize our barren souls. Whatever may be said of less-favoured places, I trust *we* have reason to acknowledge the bounties of heaven in these respects. What, then, should be the state of our minds? Should not we be penetrated with a sense of gratitude to God? Should not we determine for ourselves, and stimulate one another to fear and serve him? Yea, might we not expect that the very stones should cry out against us, if we neglected to express our gratitude in this way? But how is it with us? Where are the persons who are so impressed? Where are the persons who are so exercised? Where are the persons who thus "fear the Lord and his goodnes[k]?" Alas! alas! We may condemn the Jews for their obstinacy; but sure I am we have far greater reason to condemn ourselves as the most ungrateful of men, when not even the mercy of redemption itself has been able to bring us effectually to our God — — —]

And now, what shall I say unto you? TWO REQUESTS I would make:

1. Mark the dealings of God with you—

[Mark those which relate to you *as members of the community at large;* for in those you are deeply interested: let not the gift of rain, or genial seasons, and of abundant harvests, be overlooked, because they are common; but let them all lead you in devout thankfulness to your God. And mark still

[g] Deut. xi. 13—15.
[h] See Joel ii. 23—27.
[i] Rom. ii. 4.
[k] Hos. iii. 5.

more especially his dealings with you *as individuals*, his mercies, and his judgments, of whatever kind they be; for they all have a voice to you, and may be improved to your spiritual and eternal good. Have you mercies? Let them incline you to a willing and unreserved surrender of yourselves to God[l]. Have you judgments? "Hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it[m]." Only improve the providences that occur: and you shall never want a providence to improve.]

2. Cultivate the mind which God requires—

[He requires all to "fear and tremble at his presence[n]." And, I beseech you, account not that a legal and undesirable frame of mind. Indeed, indeed, it is the safest state for all of us. I would not undervalue exalted joys: but I confess I love most the religion of a *sinner:* I love humility and self-abasement: I love the fleeing to Christ, and the washing daily and hourly in the fountain of his blood. I love religion, under the character of holy fear; and I would have you to "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Not that it is a slavish fear that I would recommend, or a fear that is constrained by an apprehension of God's displeasure. No; it is a fear that proceeds from love; a fear that is inspired by a sense of gratitude, and that is dictated, as it were, by your own hearts; saying, "Come, let us fear the Lord our God," who has done such great things for us. It is this, this cordial willingness, this impatient desire, that puts all the value into the disposition which I am now recommending to you. And be not contented to experience this fear in your own hearts, but endeavour to impress it on all around you. Let it grieve you to see the hardness and obduracy of all your neighbours: and take occasion from every mercy, whether temporal or spiritual, to stimulate all, even to the remotest ends of the earth, to love, and serve, and glorify their God.]

[l] Rom. xii. 1. [m] Mic. vi. 9. [n] ver. 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1040

THE GOOD OLD WAY.

Jer. vi. 16. *Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

WHATEVER bears the stamp of antiquity upon it, finds, for the most part, a favourable reception in the world, while innovations are admitted with caution and reserve. The Gospel itself is often discarded

under the idea that it is new. Even as far back as the days of Jeremiah, serious religion was deemed a novelty: but the prophet claimed the people's regard to it, no less from the consideration of its antiquity than of its inherent excellence—

To elucidate the words before us, we shall inquire,

I. What is that old and good way here spoken of?

The explanation, which our Lord himself has given of this passage[a], shews, that we are not to confine its import to holiness alone, but must understand it as comprehending,

1. A penitential affiance in God—

[Christ declares that he himself is "the way," the *only* way to the Father[b]. To him we must come, trusting in his mediation and intercession, and looking for acceptance through him alone. Now this is certainly the *old* way, marked out by all the Jewish sacrifices, and trodden by Abel and our first parents. Nor can we doubt of its being the *good* way, since it was appointed of God himself, and has been approved by all his saints from the beginning of the world.]

2. A cheerful obedience to him—

[Our Lord expressly says, "Take my yoke upon you;" nor can this ever be dispensed with. Though faith in Christ be the way of acceptance with God, yet obedience to him is the only means of manifesting the sincerity of our faith. Hence holiness is by the prophet called, "The Lord's highway[c]." This too is *of great antiquity*, and must be traced up through prophets and patriarchs to the days of "righteous Abel." And it must be acknowledged to be *good*, since it tends so much to the perfecting of our nature, and to the adorning of our holy religion.]

This however is not a mere speculative point; as we shall see, if we inquire,

II. What is our duty with respect to it?

God having so plainly revealed it to us, it becomes us all,

1. To inquire after it—

[We should not go on in a presumptuous confidence that we are right; but should "stand and see," and attentively consider whither we are going. We should "ask" of those

[a] Matt. xi. 28, 29. [b] John xiv. 6. [c] Isai. xxxv. 8.

whom God has appointed to be as way-marks to the people, and whose lips should both keep, and dispense, knowledge. Moreover we should search the sacred oracles (which, as a map, delineate our path with infallible precision) comparing with them the various steps we have taken, and noticing with care the footsteps of Christ and his Apostles. Not however trusting in our own researches, we should above all implore the teaching and direction of God's holy Spirit, who would bring us back from our wanderings, and "guide our feet into the way of peace."]

2. To walk in it—

[To possess knowledge will be of little service unless it produce a practical effect. Having found the right way we must come into it, renouncing every other path, how pleasant or profitable soever it may have been. Nor must we only get into it, but "walk therein" continually, neither diverted from it by allurements, nor discouraged in it by any difficulties. Whatever advances we may have made, we are still to prosecute the same path, trusting in Christ as our advocate with God, and rendering to him an uniform and unreserved obedience.]

Nor will this appear hard to us, if we consider,

III. The encouragement given us to perform this duty—

To those who are out of this way, whatever they may boast, we are sure there is no solid peace: but they who walk in it shall find rest,

1. In their way—

[Sweet is the rest which a weary and heavy-laden sinner finds in Jesus Christ: he sees in *his* blood a sufficiency of virtue to expiate all his guilt, and to cleanse him from all his sin: he perceives that the foundation of his hope is sure and immoveable; and therefore, "having peace in his conscience, he rejoices in hope of the glory of God." In the way of holy obedience, he enjoys, moreover, a present and a great reward: for while he rests from turbulent passions and tormenting fears, he finds, that "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."]

2. In their end—

[If the ungodly have no peace in this world, much less have they in the world to come: but the obedient believer will enjoy perfect rest, when he shall have ceased from his present labours. "There is a rest remaining for the people of God;" and such a rest as neither eye hath seen, nor ear

heard, nor heart conceived: at the instant of their dismission from the body, they shall be borne on the wings of angels into the regions of the blest, and lie in the bosom of their Lord to all eternity.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who disregard religion—

[You indeed may plead long prescription (even from the days of Cain) and general practice too, in favour of your habits: but do you doubt which is the *better* way? Do you not in your hearts envy those who walk in *the good old way*; and wish that you were able to live as they live? If then you would not persist in following a track, which you knew would lead to a place extremely distant from that which you were desirous to reach, attend to the warning now given, and turn unto God in the way marked out for you in his Gospel.]

2. To those who seek indeed the paths of religion, but find no rest in them—

[There are many who approve of coming to Christ for salvation, but wish to be excused from taking his yoke upon them; while others, on the contrary, would be content to render obedience to his law, if they might be at liberty to decline the humiliating method which he has prescribed for their acceptance with God. Others, again, profess to approve of the good old way; but cannot renounce the cares and pleasures of the world which retard their progress in it. No wonder then if such persons find no solid rest: indeed, it is well for them that they do not; since it would only deceive them to their eternal ruin. If we would have rest, either here or hereafter, it must be obtained in the way that has been pointed out; nor can it be obtained in any other to all eternity[d].]

3. To those who are walking comfortably in the good way—

[Be not contented to go to heaven alone; but labour in your respective spheres to bring others along with you. This was the disposition of the Church of old[e]; and should be the desire of all who have a hope towards God. It is scarcely to be conceived how much the exertions of Christians in their several families would extend the benefits of ministerial labours. The public ministration of the word would be far better attended, and incomparably more improved. Since then all are commanded to seek instruction, let all endeavour

[d] John iii. 36. Heb. xii. 14. [e] Cant. i. 4.

to communicate it[f]. So will the good way be more frequented; and more abundant blessings flow down on all who walk in it.]

[f] If this were the subject of a Sermon for *Charity Schools*, the propriety of subscribing liberally for the support of such institutions might be stated *here*.

OUTLINE NO. 1041

EXPOSTULATION WITH THE IMPENITENT.

Jer. viii. 4—8. *Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; Shall they fall, and not arise? Shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard; but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming: but my people know not the judgment of the Lord. How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.*

WHATEVER difference civilization may produce in the external habits of men, it makes no change in the dispositions of their minds towards God. The advantages of religious instruction may rectify their sentiments in many things, and raise the standard of morals among them; but Divine grace alone can reach their hearts or dispose them to devote themselves to the service of their Maker. Hence the unregenerate amongst us are, in their general character, the same as they have been in all ages, and under all the different dispensations of religion. Papists and Protestants, Jews and Christians, differ only in name, and in a few outward observances: their hearts are all alike; and the same warnings and exhortations may be fitly addressed to them.

The Prophet Jeremiah was commanded to expostulate with the Jews upon their *wickedness*, their *impenitence*, their *folly*, and their *presumption*. On these same topics we would address ourselves to you. We

shall not however make a formal division of our discourse, or mark our transition from one part of it to another, but shall prosecute our subject in the precise order of the words before us.

Permit me then to observe to you, that,

Men will endeavour to remedy any misfortune that has happened to them—

["*If a man have fallen, he will rise again;*" he will not be contented to lie where he is, in a state of stupid indifference, but will exert himself to regain the posture that is better suited to his nature and pursuits. "*If a man turn out of the way,*" when prosecuting a journey of great importance, "*will he not,* as soon as he finds his error, *return,*" and get into the right path? No one can doubt what his conduct would be on such an occasion. Such is the conduct of all men in relation to temporal matters.]

But they do not act thus in reference to their souls—

[It is undeniable, that, we "*have slidden back*" from God, "like a backsliding heifer" that will not submit to the yoke[a] ——— Of this we cannot but be convinced, seeing that we violate his law in unnumbered instances, and neither can, nor will, endure its restraints[b]. But, "having fallen, do we strive to arise; having turned aside, do we endeavour to return?" On the contrary, have not our "*backslidings* been *perpetual,*" without any serious endeavours to amend our ways? Had our deviations from duty been only occasional, and under the influence of some violent temptation, or had they been intermitted, with seasons of penitence and contrition, there would be something hopeful in our case: but we have been contented to continue in our devious paths, and to lie wallowing in the mire of sin.

We have even laboured to persuade ourselves that we were not so faulty as God's word represented us. We have gladly embraced any principle, that might justify this opinion; and satisfied ourselves with any excuse, that might keep us from self-reproach. When our delusions have been pointed out, and the vanity of our excuses plainly shewn, we still have "*held fast deceit,*" and have taken refuge again in the same lies, just as if they had never been at all exposed. The invitations and promises which have been held forth to us in the name of God, have produced no salutary effect: we have "pulled away the shoulder," and "*refused to return,*" and "made our faces harder than a rock[c]."

[a] Hos. iv. 16. [b] Rom. viii. 7. [c] Jer. v. 3.

But, notwithstanding our obstinacy,]

God is ever looking wishfully for our return—

[" He looks down from heaven, to see if there be any that will understand and seek after him[d]." " He willeth not the death of any man, but rather that he should come to repentance and live[e]." He even swears that this is the state of his mind towards us[f]. He " *hearkens* " with more than parental anxiety; 'Cannot I *hear* some acknowledgment amongst them; cannot I hear so much as one groan, or one sigh? O that I could! O that they would suffer me to exercise mercy towards them[g]! Would they but " *speak aright*," and condemn themselves for their iniquities, I would soon shew them how gracious and merciful I am.' Thus does God listen, as it were, in hopes that some will repent and turn unto him;]

But scarce any will *repent of their wickedness*, or even consider their ways—

[We hope that impenitence is not quite so universal amongst us, as among those whom the prophet addressed. We cannot quite adopt his complaint, and say that " *no man* " repents. We trust there are some amongst us, who have " called their ways to remembrance," and sought for mercy in God's appointed way[h] — — — But certainly there are very few that will turn their thoughts inward, or seriously ask themselves, " *What have I done?* " Reflection is painful to the generality; and, instead of cherishing it, and setting apart seasons on purpose for it, the greater part do all they can to stifle it; they run to pleasure, to company, to business, in order to shake out of their minds all painful recollections. In all the concerns of time, they will examine carefully enough, whether they have prospered or not: nor would they be averse, in a journey through woods and forests, to compare their steps with the directory that had been given them, and to inquire occasionally whether they were in the right path. But in the concerns of their souls they harbour no doubts; they go on even in direct opposition to the strongest evidence; and take for granted that they are right, when, if they would make the smallest inquiry, they could not but find that they are in the most fatal error.]

Too many amongst us seem even to glory in their sins—

[The image by which this truth is represented in the text, is as just and beautiful as any that can be conceived. Look a

[d] Ps. xiv. 2. [e] 2 Pet. iii. 9. [f] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[g] Jer. iii. 4, 13. and xiii. 27. and Hos. xi. 8.
[h] This must be amplified, or not, according to the state of the persons addressed.

the description given of the war-horse in the book of Job: "He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth forth to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting[i]." What a lively representation is this of sinful man! he heareth of God's judgments, but laugheth at them: he in a measure feels them; and is only stirred up by them to a more resolute defiance of them. Destructive as his sin is, he "makes a mock at it," and accounts it sport: and, whatever his ways have been, whether those of a proud self-righteousness, or open profaneness, he "*turns to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*"]

In these respects they act a more irrational part than even the brute creation—

["*The stork, the turtle, the crane, the swallow, observe*" invariably the approach of summer or of winter; and adopt measures either to escape the impending calamities, or to secure the blessings which God has prepared for them. They loiter not till the season for action is past, but avail themselves of the first intimations which they receive, to avoid the evil, and obtain the good. But sinful men possess not that wisdom; they "*know not the judgment of the Lord:*" God tells them of approaching blessings, but they labour not to possess them: he warns them also of approaching miseries, but they use no means to escape them: though they feel in themselves, and behold in all around them, striking intimations of the way in which God will ultimately proceed with men, they take not one step to avert his wrath, or to conciliate his favour.]

To complete the whole, they persuade themselves that they are safe and happy—

[They call their own ways wisdom, and the conduct of those who differ from them, folly. Surprising! "*We are wise!*" Would they account any one wise that should pursue a similar conduct in reference to the things of this world? Would it be wise in a merchant never to inquire into the state of his affairs? Would it be wise in a person to reject wholesome food, and to eat nothing but what was sure to bring upon him disorders and death? Yet the folly of such persons would not be worthy to be compared with that which the inconsiderate world are guilty of, in reference to their everlasting concerns. And

[i] Job xxxix. 21—25.

strange it is to say, that they will even quote the word of God, as countenancing their ways; and, without once considering the true import of the passages they adduce, they will cry, "*The law of the Lord is with us*[k]." But let them bring forth their strong reasons; let them shew us from the word of God, that no "difference shall be put between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth the Lord and him that serveth him not:" let them prove to us, that a course of sin and impenitence, and an unconcern about our future state, are innocent, or at most only trifling faults, which will not be regarded in the day of judgment. Let them shew us these things from the word of God; and then we are prepared to say, "*In vain has God made it, and the pen of the scribes* (who have either recorded or expounded it) *is in vain.*" *Certainly*, if they succeed in that attempt, the Bible is the most worthless book in the universe; for men could live in sin and neglect God, without any book to direct or encourage them in such ways.]

That our expostulation may not fall to the ground, we entreat you to listen to a few words of salutary ADVICE—

1. Consider your ways—

[This is a reasonable duty; and can do you no harm: if your conduct have been conformable with the will of God, you will have great comfort in ascertaining that it has been so: if, on the contrary, it has been such as God decidedly condemns, you will have an opportunity of altering it before it be too late — — —]

2. Renounce your sins—

[This must be connected with the former, and indeed must result from it[l]. You cannot but know that there has been much amiss, both in your heart and life: search it out therefore, and, whatever it may be, put it from you: if it be useful as a right hand, or precious as a right eye, spare it not, but cast it uttterly away. Attempt not to justify or extenuate it; but acknowledge your criminality and danger; and cast overboard the goods that would sink the ship — — —]

3. Obey the Gospel—

[Sinful as your state has been, the Gospel proposes to you an infallible remedy: it sets forth a Saviour; and invites you to come to him. Obey the call: come to him, who bought you with his blood: and accept the salvation which he freely offers to the chief of sinners — — — At the same time "*Be wise*

[k] They will quote Prov. iii. 17. and Mic. vi. 8.
[l] Ezek. xviii. 28.

indeed, and *let the word of the Lord be truly with you.*" Let "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" be indeed the one ground of your hope, and the one rule of your conduct. Let the light which it exhibits be desired by you; and let all "your deeds be brought to it, that it may be manifest that they are wrought in God."]

OUTLINE NO. 1042

HEALING OUR WOUNDS SLIGHTLY.

Jer. viii. 11. *They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.*

THERE were, amongst the Jews, false prophets, who accommodated themselves to the corrupt taste of their hearers, who said to them, "Prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." In particular, they assured the people that the judgments denounced against them by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, should never come upon them; that the king of Babylon should never succeed in his efforts against Jerusalem; and that, though they should still continue to walk after the imagination of their own evil hearts they had nothing to fear[a]. Thus they lulled the people asleep in their sins, "promising them peace, when in reality there was no peace;" but the heaviest judgments of Almighty God were impending over them[b].

Such prophets have existed at all periods of the Church, "with lies making the heart of the righteous sad; whom God has not made sad; and strengthening the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life[c]."

But whilst we lament the effect of such delusive ministrations, and refer all persons to the written word, as the only true standard of sound doctrine; we would not forget, that men love to deceive themselves, and, by indulging vain conceits of their own, in opposition to the written word, to silence the

[a] Jer. xxiii. 17. [b] Ezek. xiii. 10—16.
[c] Ezek. xiii. 22. with Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

convictions of conscience, and to "speak peace to themselves, when there is no peace." For the benefit of such persons, we will endeavour to shew,

I. What need we all have of healing—

Sin has infected all the powers of our souls ——— This melancholy truth is,

1. Asserted in the Scriptures—

["God made man upright; but he has sought out many inventions[d]." His very heart is corrupt[e]; so that "every imagination of it is evil, and only evil, continually[f]." The extent of his depravity can scarcely be overstated: as the Apostle clearly shews[g] ——— and the description given of the Jewish people may be well applied to every people, yea, and to every individual also in the whole world: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint: from the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in us; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores[h]."]

2. Confirmed by experience—

[Who is there amongst us that must not confess this to be his own state? Who does not find darkness in his understanding, rebellion in his will, sensuality in his affections? Who is there that does not perceive a partiality in his conscience, and, as far as spiritual things are concerned, a forgetfulness in his memory; so that, in all his faculties, he is unlike what he was when he came out of his Creator's hands? That there are some *traces* of his original excellence, I willingly admit. There is in some persons a measure of benevolence towards *man:* but towards *God* there is in all the same rooted indisposition and enmity: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[i]."]

But, as many think themselves healed whilst yet they are in a perishing condition, I will proceed to shew,

II. Who they are that heal their wounds slightly—

Of these there are many classes: many "speak peace to themselves, when there is no peace." Amongst these are,

1. They who rely on the uncovenanted mercy of God—

[d] Eccl. vii. 29. [e] Jer. xvii. 9. [f] Gen. vi. 5.
[g] Rom. iii. 9—18. [h] Isai. i. 5, 6. [i] Rom. viii. 7.

[Many have an idea that God is too merciful to inflict on men the judgments he has denounced against sin: and on this presumption they dismiss all fear of future punishment. As for the justice or holiness of the Deity, they altogether overlook them; supposing that their claims may be superseded without any difficulty, and that truth itself also may be violated without any dishonour done to God. But all this is a delusion, which will betray them to their ruin. God is merciful, no doubt; yea, merciful beyond all conception: but then his mercy flows only in that channel which he himself has prepared, even through the Son of his love: and to expect it in any way that is inconsistent with the Divine attributes, is fatally to deceive our own souls.]

2. They who take refuge in a round of duties—

[It is common for persons, when convinced of sin, to engage in religious duties, with a hope of making thereby their peace with God. They will begin to read the Scriptures in private, and to attend on divine ordinances in public, and exercise a greater measure of benevolence to their fellow-creatures; trusting that God will accept their services, and for the sake of them will pardon their past transgressions. But this is only to "heal their wounds slightly:" for there are two things necessary to their perfect restoration; the one is, to make an atonement for sin; the other is, to get their souls renewed after the Divine image: but neither of these can ever be effected by any exertions of their own. The attainments of the Apostle Paul, eminent as they were, could not stand in the place of Christ, either before his conversion or afterwards: and therefore he desired "to be found in Christ; not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ[k]." Much more, therefore, must *we* renounce all hope of acceptance with God through any works of our own; and seek salvation by Christ alone, if ever we would "behold the face of God in peace."]

3. They who rest in a faith that is unproductive of good works—

[True it is, that we must be saved by faith alone: and equally true it is, that faith does not save us, *because* it produces good works. It saves us *simply as apprehending Christ*, in and through whom we are reconciled to God. But the faith which apprehends Christ aright, will work; it will "work by love," and "purify the heart," and "overcome the world:" and if the faith which we possess do not operate in this way, it is dead, and of no more efficacy for our salvation than the faith of devils. The only faith which will be of real service to

[k] Phil. iii. 9.

us, is that which unites us unto Christ, as branches to the vine; and enables us, by virtue derived from him, to bring forth fruit to his glory.]

Yet, as there is a perfect remedy, it becomes me to state,

III. How we may have them healed effectually—

The Lord Jesus Christ has provided a remedy for sin—

[He has, by his own obedience unto death, atoned for sin, and "brought in an everlasting righteousness" for his believing people. Hear the blessed tidings brought to us by the Prophet Isaiah: "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and *with his stripes we are healed*[l]." Stupendous thought! We healed by stripes! by stripes inflicted on Jehovah's fellow! What a mystery is this! how utterly incomprehensible! Well does the Apostle say, "How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out[m]!"]

That remedy, applied by faith, shall be effectual for all who trust in it—

[The man who believes in Christ, has all his guilt purged away; so that "though his sins may have been as crimson, they shall be as wool; though they have been as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow[n]." Nor is this all: the man who believes in him, shall receive out of his fulness such a supply of grace as shall be effectual for the restoration of his soul to the Divine "image, in righteousness and true holiness." The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, that "We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[o]." Thus, by this simple remedy, shall our guilt be removed; and, at the same time, the corruption of our nature, like the waters of Jericho, be healed by the salt of divine grace infused into the soul[p]. If any be not healed, it is not for want of a Physician; but because, with the balm of Gilead in their hands, they will not apply it[q].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who feel not their need of healing—

[Many, who are sensible that our nature is imperfect, have yet no conception that they are infected with a fatal

[l] Isai. liii. 5. [m] Rom. xi. 33. [n] Isai. i. 18.
[o] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [p] 2 Kings ii. 19—22. [q] ver. 22.

malady; or that, without a most stupendous effort of divine grace, they must eternally perish. But, though they are called Christians, they are ignorant of the very nature of Christianity. I say again, they know not what Christianity is: and if they were asked to give IN ONE WORD *such a description of Christianity as should suffice to characterize it in all its parts*, they would be utterly at a loss, and would say that an impracticable task was imposed upon them. But Christianity is A REMEDY: it necessarily supposes a deep malady, which it is not in the power of any finite being to heal; and it prescribes such means of healing as shall be effectual for our recovery. The malady and the remedy correspond with each other: whichever be seen, the lineaments of the other may be inferred from it: they answer to each other, as accurately as the impression to the seal. There is nothing in us, for which there is not a correspondent provision in Christ: nor is there any thing in Christ, of which there is not a correspondent want in us. Were this duly understood, there would be no persons of the description that I am now addressing. But to all, without exception, must I declare, that "it was not *the righteous* that Christ came to save, but sinners;" ("the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:") and if we feel not our lost estate, we can receive no benefit from Christianity, no salvation from Christ. "It is the broken heart whom he heals, and whose wounds he bindeth up[r]."]

2. Those who, after having derived some benefits from Christ, have relapsed into sin—

[Such persons there are, in great abundance: and greatly is their guilt augmented by their misimprovement of the mercies conferred. If they continue in their declension, "it were better for them that they had never known the way of righteousness;" for "their last end will be worse than their beginning." But they are not beyond the reach of healing. Rather, I should say, their Lord is more particularly anxious respecting them, and gives this injunction to his servants: "Go, and proclaim these words; Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you[s]." "I will heal your backsliding, and love you freely: for mine anger is turned away from you[t]." If you are ready to despond because of your unworthy conduct, he cuts off at once all ground of despondency, by saying, "For the iniquity that he committed I was wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth; and yet he went on frowardly, in the way of his heart. But I have seen his ways, and (What? will cast him off, and execute my heaviest judgments on him?

[r] Ps. cxlvii. 3. [s] Jer. iii. 12. [t] Hos. xiv. 4.

No: I have seen his ways, and) will heal him; and will restore comfort also to him and to his mourners[u]." Avail yourselves then, my Brethren, of the opportunity now afforded you; and go to Him who is able to save you to the uttermost," and "will cast out none who come unto him." But remember, you must be content to have your wounds probed to the very bottom; lest, after all, the healing of them should be only superficial.]

3. Those who are enjoying health in their souls—

[Happy indeed is your state. You have the true enjoyment of life. We feel the benefit of health, as it respects the body: for it enables us to perform every office of life with ease and pleasure; whilst to the sick and the infirm even the smallest labour is difficult. So, to the man that is under the power of sin, all spiritual exercises are irksome: but to him whose "soul prospers, and is in health," the ways of God are beyond measure delightful. Be careful then, beloved, to preserve your health. Be living nigh to your heavenly Physician; and, at the very first appearance of disorder in your soul, apply to him. So will he "keep you in perfect peace," and "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."]

[u] Isai. lvii. 17, 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1043

THE REMEDY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR SEASONS OF GRACE.

Jer. viii. 20—22. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered*[a]*?*

[a] This may be more simplified, by taking *the character of the text* as the ground of the distribution and discussion. Thus, consider,

I. His affectionate lamentation—

The people had hoped to receive succour from Egypt, but the time for marching armies was past away, and they were left without succour. But I rather think the sense to be, God had given them time for repentance, and had warned them by his prophets, but all in vain Now therefore they were left to the fury of their invading foes. On account of their impending calamities the prophet was greatly distressed And is there not similar occasion for lamentation over you? How many warnings from the Lord have you received! How many opportunities for your souls, as favourable as the summer for harvest! Yet

EVERY one acknowledges that it is his duty to trust in God; but we are prone to creature-confidence. Hence we are often left to faint under difficulties from which we might easily have been extricated. Thus the Jews increased their distress by relying on the Egyptians for succour, when, if they would have trusted in God, they might have been delivered. The prophet therefore takes up this affectionate lamentation over them:

in what a state are your souls! as far from salvation as if you had never heard of a Saviour, or had salvation offered to you in his name! If the prophet then wept over the temporal calamities of his people, how much greater reason have I to weep over you! (chap. ix. 1.) Were your impending calamities temporal only, they were not worthy of a thought, in comparison of those which are shortly coming upon you — — — If your souls be *not saved*, no language can express, or imagination conceive, the misery that awaits them.

II. His tender expostulation—

Gilead was famous for balm, which physicians were wont to use for their patients. Under that image the prophet tells them how effectually they might have been recovered, if they had sought help from God. Their destruction therefore was wholly of themselves. And may I not make the same appeal to you? Has not Christ been set before you as the heavenly Physician? Has not the efficacy of his blood to cleanse from sin been pointed out to you? Would not the Lord Jesus have healed your souls, if you had applied to him? ——— Yes, verily it is your own fault that you are not recovered. "Ye *will not* come to Christ that ye may have life."

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are insensible of their danger—

Your danger is indeed both great and imminent; and I entreat you to delay no longer, what in a short space of time there will be no possibility of effecting — — —

2. Those who after hopeful symptoms of recovery have relapsed—

It were better never to have sought the Lord at all, than to have turned back again to your sins. O bless your God that the summer is not yet quite ended; and cease not to apply to the great Physician, till perfect health is restored to your souls.

3. Those who are in a course of recovery—

Fear not, but that the balm of Gilead will prove sufficient. Live nigh to God in the daily application of that balm to your souls, and you may set all your enemies at defiance. Your sins shall all be healed; and Satan himself, as a vanquished foe, be bruised under your feet.

I. Who are they of whom it may be said "their harvest is past, their summer is ended, and they are not saved?"

In its primary sense this passage is applicable only to the Jews, when they were attacked by the Babylonians; but it may be applied to those who have lost seasons of spiritual relief. The "summer and harvest" may be considered as seasons afforded us by God for providing for the necessities of our souls. Many of these we have suffered to pass unimproved and unnoticed. They therefore may be said to have lost their summer, &c. who have neglected to improve the seasons afforded,

1. By nature—

[*Youth* is well fitted by nature for the work of conversion. The mind is then more flexible, the passions more governable, and the conscience more tender. But many have lost that favourable season.]

2. By Providence—

[*Mercies* are sent by God to invite, *judgments* to alarm. But many who should have been drawn by them to seek after God, have remained impenitent. *The sabbath* also was instituted by God for the promoting of man's spiritual welfare. On that day more especially God calls and converts sinners to himself. But many have let those seasons pass, without obtaining the knowledge of salvation.]

3. By grace—

[There are times when all experience *the strivings of God's Spirit.* If they improved those seasons, God would "give them more grace." But many stifle their convictions, and "resist the Holy Ghost."]

They who are in this predicament would do well to reflect on,

II. The misery of their state—

The distress of the prophet's mind on account of the calamities that were coming on the Jews is most pathetically expressed. But a view of the miseries impending over those who have lost their seasons of grace might well excite yet more painful apprehensions.

Their seasons lost are irrecoverable—

[Present time is often wasted, as though it were of no value. But many would be glad on a death-bed to recall the seasons in which they had heard the tidings of salvation, or felt the motions of God's Spirit. Such wishes, however, are all in vain.]

Their seasons lost may never be renewed—

[We are apt to promise ourselves days and years to come[b]. But how often does death disappoint our expectations!]

Every lost season has greatly aggravated their guilt—

[The means of grace are most important and valuable "talents." The neglecting to improve them will be severely punished[c].]

Every season they have lost has hardened their hearts—

[The word that does not quicken and save will stupify and condemn[d].]

Every lost season has grieved the Holy Spirit more and more—

[God will not alway strive with those who resist his motions[e]. If he cease to strive with us, our destruction is inevitable[f].]

How should we compassionate those who are in such a state! How should every one adopt the words following my text[g]! But their condition is not desperate:

III. The remedy that yet remains for them—

We might be ready to suppose that such persons were incurable; but the animated interrogatories in the text shew the contrary—

[Christ is a "physician" *able* and *willing* to save those who come unto him — — — His blood is a "balm" that heals the most deadly wounds[h] — — — The true reason that so many die in their sins is, that they will not come to Christ for salvation[i] — — — Let every one then acknowledge that it is his own fault if he be not saved.]

[b] Acts xxiv. 25.
[c] Matt. xxv. 26, 30.
[d] Matt. xiii. 14, 15. 2 Cor. ii. 16.
[e] Gen. vi. 3.
[f] Hos. ix. 12.
[g] Jer. ix. 1.
[h] Isai. i. 18. 1 John i. 7.
[i] John v. 40.

OUTLINE NO. 1044

CHRIST OUR PHYSICIAN.

Jer. viii. 22. *Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

AS the Eastern languages in general, so the inspired writings in particular, abound in metaphors. In this view, they are peculiarly calculated to convey instruction; because they embody truth, as it were; they dress it in the most inviting colours, and bring it home to the mind with most commanding energy. Metaphors are of necessity founded on some acknowledged truth: if therefore the figure itself be just and apposite, the sentiment contained under it becomes so much the more luminous and impressive. The general idea intended to be conveyed in the words of our text, is this; that, though God was so severely punishing the Jewish nation, he was willing to remove his judgments from them, and to restore them to his favour, if they would use the means which his prophets had prescribed: lamentable as their state was become, they were not beyond the reach of mercy, if they would repent themselves, and turn unto their God. Now this sentiment is conveyed in metaphorical expressions; the literal import of which is, that no one with the means of recovery before him would be foolish enough to continue under the pressure of a painful and dangerous disorder. This truth every one feels and acknowledges: and consequently we must acknowledge yet more strongly the folly and wickedness of continuing under the displeasure of God, when we have at hand the certain means of deliverance from it.

To impress this thought upon your minds, we shall,

I. Shew what is that state of recovery to which God desires to bring us—

That man is disordered by means of sin, is so evident, that we scarcely need insist upon it. We justly say in the general confession of our Church, "There

is no health in us:" and we may as justly apply to our state that description of the Prophet Isaiah, "From the sole of our foot even to the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." Still however there is such a thing as a state of health: and what that is, we may learn,

1. From the condition of some who had never known sickness—

[Adam in Paradise was made after the Divine image: every perfection of the Deity, as far as it was communicable to a creature, was found in him. His dispositions were altogether in unison with the will of God. He communed with his Maker daily, as with his familiar friend; and sought all his happiness in the performance of his will, and in the enjoyment of his presence.

Our blessed Lord and Saviour also is another example of one who never knew sin. In his early years we have but little information about him, except that he was subject to his parents, and obedient to them in all things: and though we cannot consider this as *the whole* of a child's religion, we do not hesitate to say, that it is a most essential part of it, and that religion never can exist where this proof of it is wanting. When he had attained the age of twelve, we are enabled to speak determinately concerning him. Then, we know, that he loved the house of God, and found all his delight in the services of religion. Yea, with such intenseness was he engaged in communicating and receiving instruction, that he let his parents go from Jerusalem without him; and, when they found him in the temple after three days, expressed his wonder that they felt any solicitude about him, and that they did not at once conclude him to be occupied "about his Father's business." When he entered on his ministry, he made it "his meat and drink to do his Father's will:" after labouring in his vocation the whole day, he would sometimes spend whole nights in prayer. He went about doing good amongst the poorest and vilest of mankind: and when his love was recompensed only by the most cruel insults and persecutions, he rendered nothing but good for evil: "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not:" yea, rather, he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his very murderers.]

2. From the condition of some who had experienced a recovery—

[We cannot easily find persons more diseased than *those to whom Peter addressed himself on the day of Pentecost.* They had withstood all the discourses and miracles of our

blessed Lord; and their hands were yet reeking with the Saviour's blood. But as soon as the grace of God reached their hearts, they were humbled for their sins, they believed in Christ as their only Saviour, they addicted themselves to the ministry of the Apostles, they felt the most cordial affection towards all the despised followers of Jesus, they sold all their possessions for the support of his Church and people, and they found all their happiness in the exercises of devotion, and the service of their God[a].

The Apostle Paul is another instance of a most astonishing recovery. He had been filled with such a murderous zeal against the followers of Christ, that he "breathed out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against them." But when he was stopped in his career, he became the most zealous and active of all the Apostles. No trials could deter him from prosecuting his Master's work: he counted not his life dear unto him; yea, "if he should be offered upon the sacrifice and service of his brethren's faith," and pour out his blood as a libation for the Church, he considered it as a ground of most exalted joy and thanksgiving[b].]

3. From these instances we may learn, I say, what a state of recovery is—

[It consists, first of all, in turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, with deep humiliation, and with lively faith. It consists, next, in mortifying all those corruptions which formerly led us captive, and in devoting all our powers to the service of our God. In a word, it consists in following the steps of our adorable Emmanuel, in being "pure as he was pure," and "perfect as he was perfect." And to this it is the earnest desire of our God to bring us: "Wilt thou not be made clean?" says he; "O when shall it once be[c]?"]

Now, if God really desire to bring us to this happy state, we should,

II. Inquire, Whence it is that we do not already enjoy it?

It is not for want of adequate provision for us on the part of God—

[God himself appeals to us respecting this: "Is there not balm in Gilead; is there not a Physician there?" Has not God sent us a Physician from heaven, even his only dear Son, who perfectly knows the extent of our disorders, and is able to prescribe a remedy for them? Other physicians find their

[a] Acts ii. 41—47. [b] Phil. ii. 17, 18. [c] Jer. xiii. 27.

remedies in the productions of nature and of art; but this blessed Physician "heals his people with his own stripes:" he shed his own precious blood for us upon the cross, that it might be applied, as a sovereign balm, to our souls, to restore us to perfect health. And now we appeal to all of you: Is there any want of skill in this Physician, or any want of virtue in this balm? Have not thousands and millions of persons, dying of the malady of sin, experienced a perfect restoration of health through the application of the blood of Christ to their souls? Is there any reason to doubt, but that it would be as efficacious for you, as for them? And is not this remedy offered you "without money and without price?"

Behold then, ye are witnesses for God this day, that no blame attaches to him, and that the continuance of your maladies can in no respect be imputed to him.]

It is altogether owing to yourselves—

1. You do not believe that your disorders are so great and fatal as God has represented them—

[That sin has in a measure disordered your souls, you will readily acknowledge; but that your diseases are mortal, and that you must die to all eternity if they be not healed, you do not believe. We ask only what you would do, if you felt within yourselves a bodily disorder, which you were certain would destroy your life in a few hours if a remedy were not instantly applied? Would you not send for a physician without delay, and be in the utmost solicitude till he arrived for your relief? Why then is there not all this anxiety about your souls? Why are you not seeking the Lord Jesus Christ with your whole hearts? Our Lord assigns the true reason; "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" and you feel no need of him, because you are not duly sensible of your sickness.]

2. You do not like the prescriptions which the good Physician has appointed for you—

[*Repentance* is regarded by you as a bitter pill, which you are very averse to take. *Faith in the atoning blood of Christ* is so humiliating, that you cannot make up your minds to submit to it: you think that you may be excused going to him with all that contrition and self-renunciation which the Gospel requires. "*The living henceforth not to yourselves, but unto him*," and "the having your whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified" and devoted to the Lord, is also regarded by you as an insufferable restraint. You would be far better pleased to be left in possession of those gratifications which are pleasing to your corrupt nature, and which foster the most deadly diseases of your souls.]

3. You hope for some more convenient season for returning to your God—

[You have a general persuasion that you must experience a change before you go hence; but you wish to put it off to some future period. You are too young at present, or have too many engagements; and you think a time of sickness will be more favourable to reflection; and, as God has shewn mercy to many in their last hours, you hope he may to you. This completes what the other errors have begun. This lulls you asleep in fatal security. If ignorance slays its thousands, this procrastinating habit slays its ten thousands.]

Having shewn you the true reasons why your health is not recovered, I would impress the subject yet further on your minds, by asking two QUESTIONS.

1. Would not the recovery of your souls tend to your *present* happiness?

[Grant that the votary of pleasure obtains all that he seeks after; is not he who has his sins forgiven, his corruptions mortified, his soul transformed into the Divine image, the sting of death removed, and a glorious inheritance secured to him, the happier man? ——— We will abide the decision of your own consciences.]

2. Will not the consequence of dying in your present diseased state be terrible?

[Terrible it will be to all; but most of all to those who have their diseases faithfully pointed out to them, and the heavenly Physician brought before them. O how pungent will that question be to them in the day of judgment, "Why were not *ye* recovered, *ye*, who had the balm of Gilead freely offered you, and who withstood the most pressing solicitations to accept of mercy?" O that ye may be wise in time! and that, instead of having *then* to regret the opportunities you have lost, you may *now* be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases!"]

OUTLINE NO. 1045

FORTITUDE RECOMMENDED ON THE SIDE OF TRUTH.

Jer. ix. 3. *They are not valiant for the truth upon the earth.*

IT is by no means uncommon to see men valiant in their country's cause, or fearless in the commission

of iniquity. But courage on the side of religion is a quality but rarely seen. This virtue attaches not itself to strength of nerves, nor is it a necessary attendant on constitutional intrepidity. It is a grace, produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit; and is found equally to adorn the weaker as the stronger sex. The want of natural courage is a fault in those only who enter into professions where the exercise of it is essential to a proper discharge of their duty: but the want of spiritual valour is a crime, for which we must answer before God: yea, it is a great and heinous crime, for which we have reason to dread his heaviest judgments. The prophet, when enumerating the sins which prevailed among the Jews, and which caused him to weep over them day and night, mentions this as one that called for his severest reprehension; namely, that when they could "proceed with undaunted effrontery from evil to evil," they "were not valiant for the truth upon the earth."

In illustrating these words, we propose to shew,

I. That valour is requisite on the side of truth—

Let "truth" be taken in the lowest sense, as meaning nothing more than common justice and equity, and there will still be found need of valour for the maintenance of it in the world. Let a magistrate set himself vigorously to reform abuses, and he will soon find that vice and profaneness will maintain a violent contest against him, and that he has need of courage to carry his plans into full effect.

But if we understand "the truth" as comprehending the whole extent of our duty not only as men but as Christians, our need of valour in maintaining it will be still more apparent. We stand in need of it,

1. To profess the truth—

[Who does not know that a profession of religion subjects us to contempt? What was said of the Christians of the first ages, is equally true at this day; "We know that this sect is everywhere spoken against." Men will "gaze strangely at us, as soon as we cease to run with them into their excess of riot[a]." As soon as we "depart from evil, we make ourselves a prey[b]"

[a] 1 Pet. iv. 4. [b] Isai. lix. 15.

which every one feels himself at liberty to hunt. What the Gibeonites experienced, when they made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel, is a striking emblem of what must be expected by all who submit to Jesus, and associate themselves with his people[c] — — — And does it not require courage to endure this? — — — Verily, there are many who would find it easier to walk up to the mouth of a cannon, than to brave the contempt and obloquy to which a profession of religion would expose them.]

2. To practise it—

[Let a person be solicited by his friends to unite with them in courses which he disapproves; let him be ridiculed as indulging needless scrupulosity and preciseness, or perhaps as hypocritically pretending to more sanctity than his neighbours; will he find it easier to be steadfast in his obedience to God, dissembling no truth, omitting no duty, conforming to nothing dubious or sinful? Will he need no courage to stem the torrent, to disregard the appearances of singularity, and to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man? — — —]

3. To recommend and enforce it—

[The Gospel enjoins us, not only to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." Now we know what have been the consequences of such faithfulness in all ages; "I hate Micaiah, because he doth not speak good concerning me, but evil:" "The world hateth me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil[d]." And is it a light matter to encounter the hatred of our friends, and relatives, yea, and of the whole world? When we foresee these consequences, are we in no danger of withholding the admonitions and instructions which we ought to give? Are we in no danger of "putting our light under a bushel," when we know what offence will be taken at us, if we suffer it to shine forth? Are we under no temptation to indulge that "fear of man which bringeth a snare?"]

If we cannot recommend, or practise, or even profess, religion, without valour, we can have no doubt about,

II. The duty of exercising it—

It is a duty we owe,

1. To God—

[God has not told us to obey his commandments only as far as the world will approve, but to "follow him fully," and to love and serve him with our whole hearts. Will he then be

[c] Josh. x. 3, 4. [d] John vii. 7.

contented to see us "partial in the law?" Will he accept our plea, if we urge our fear of man as a reason of our not fearing and obeying *him?* No: he has bidden us "not to fear man, who can only kill the body; but to fear *him*, who can destroy both body and soul in hell[e]."]

2. To our neighbours—

[What will they think of religion, if they see us, who profess it, violating its most sacred obligations through fear of offending man? Will they not imagine that it is not worth contending for? Will they not be emboldened to shew the same preference to the world that we do; and to regard the opinions of men more than the commands of God? On the contrary, Would not a firm, bold, decided conduct tend to convince them, that God is worthy to be served, and that "his loving-kindness is better than life itself?"]

3. To ourselves—

[Our own everlasting welfare depends upon our steadfastness in the ways of God. "If we are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of us:" "if we deny him, he will deny us;" "if we draw back, it will be unto perdition; for his soul can have no pleasure in us:" "he only that overcometh, shall inherit all things;" and "he only that endureth unto the end, shall ever be saved." If then we have any regard for our own souls, we must be valiant, and "quit ourselves like men:" for if even life itself be suffered to stand in competition with his will, our souls will be forfeited and lost for ever[f].]

It is not however sufficient to possess valour: we should also understand,

III. In what way it should be exercised—

Here we are very liable to err: true Christian valour should be shewn,

1. In meek and patient sufferings—

[Passive valour is by far the most valuable. Would we see it illustrated? Let us see how it operated in the Apostle Paul: "Being defamed," says he, "we entreat; being persecuted, we suffer it." Would we behold the most striking exemplification of it that ever existed? Let us behold Jesus, who had just before evinced his power over his enemies by striking them all to the ground with a word, yielding up himself to them, and led as a sheep to the slaughter. Behold him, "dumb before them, even as a sheep before her shearers; giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and not hiding his face from shame and spitting:" "when

[e] Luke xii. 4, 5. [f] Matt. x. 39.

he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself unto him that judgeth righteously:" yes, here was precisely the valour which we are called to exercise. We must "possess our souls in patience," and "let patience have its perfect work." If once we recede from this ground, we are vanquished. If we would "not be overcome of evil, we must overcome evil with good."]

2. In firm and steady perseverance—

[Obedience to God is the great point: to that we must adhere at all events. We must resemble Daniel and the Hebrew youths, and determine to suffer the most cruel death, rather than violate the dictates of our conscience[g], or neglect any known duty whatsoever[h]. Next to our blessed Lord, St. Paul perhaps endured more for the truth's sake than any of the children of men: in every place, bonds and afflictions awaited him: but "none of those things could move him, neither counted he his life dear unto him, so that he might but fulfil the ministry" committed to him: he was "willing not only to be bound, but also to die," at any place, at any time, and in any manner, for his Master's sake: when he had been stoned, and left for dead, at Lystra, he returned again speedily to that very city, regardless of his own life, and intent only on executing the commission which he had received of the Lord Jesus[i]? Thus must we go on, "steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord:" and in such a course we shall approve ourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."]

We would ADD to what has been said, a word,

1. Of caution—

[Let not any imagine that Christian fortitude at all militates against the duties which we owe to our parents, or to any that are placed in authority over us. Many are apt to mistake pertness and forwardness as marks of valour: but "they know not what spirit they are of;" they are, in fact, displeasing God as much as man, while they indulge a petulant, froward disposition. We need look well to ourselves in this particular, and see that we are not gratifying our own self-will, under a pretended regard for the commands of God. We should never forget the respect due to our superiors: and when we are forced to act contrary to their commands, we should strive as much as possible to conciliate them in our manner of doing it; and shew them, that our opposition to their will is not a matter of choice, but of necessity.]

2. Of encouragement—

[None need to fear, as though they should not be able to act valiantly in the hour of trial: for God has promised, that

[g] Dan. iii. 16—18. [h] Dan. vi. 10. [i] Acts xiv. 8, 19, 21

we shall not be tempted above our ability to withstand, or without a way for us to escape[k]. We are told of women, who, under the most grievous sufferings for conscience sake, would not accept deliverance, when it was offered as an inducement to recede from their principles[l]. We need not fear therefore but that "*our* strength also shall be according to our day[m]." God will "strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness:" and "his strength shall be perfected in our weakness." In the weakest amongst us shall that promise be exemplified, "They that do know their God, shall be strong, and do exploits[n]."]

[k] 1 Cor. x. 13. [l] Heb. xi. 35.
[m] Deut. xxxiii. 25. [n] Dan. xi. 32.

OUTLINE NO. 1046

THE ONLY TRUE AND SUFFICIENT GROUNDS OF GLORYING.

Jer. ix. 23, 24. *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth.*[a]

TO know the Creator is the supreme excellence and chief good of man. The Jews enjoyed greater opportunities of obtaining this knowledge than any people upon earth: yet they neglected to improve their advantages; and, like the nations around them, sought their happiness in the creature, and confided in it for their security; having forsaken him who was their Rock of Defence. They treated Jeremiah's predictions of their captivity in Babylon with contempt. This the prophet saw and bitterly lamented: and hoping still if possible to reclaim them and thereby to prevent their calamity, and to secure to them a permanent enjoyment of their privileges, he exhorted them in the name of God himself to renounce all dependence on their own wisdom, might, or riches; and to glory rather in the knowledge of their God, and an acquaintance with him as their Protector and Deliverer. To us who have a much clearer revelation of God's

[a] The Author's first Sermon before the University, preached in 1785, now above forty-six years ago, and never before published.

nature and perfections, the exhortation may be applied with still more propriety and stronger energy.

Let us then (as the text requires) first *remove the false and insufficient grounds of glorying*, and then *propose such as are true and sufficient.*

The usual grounds of glorying the prophet here proscribes:

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches."

It is by no means to be imagined that earthly things are to be utterly disregarded, and that Christians in these days are to expect those miraculous gifts of wisdom and power which were bestowed in the days of the Apostles, or that we are now called to forsake our several occupations as they were: this would be enthusiasm indeed. At the first promulgation of Christianity, it was necessary that the instruments used for that purpose should be both weak and illiterate, that the excellency of the power might more evidently appear to be of God: but the person who should now hope to speak by inspiration, to work miracles, or live like the birds of the air, without any thought for the morrow, would grossly misunderstand the Scriptures, and become an object of ridicule or pity to all rational and sober-minded Christians.

Wisdom is highly necessary in religious concerns and in every department of social life; it capacitates us for instructing others; it enables us to make improvements in arts and sciences; it qualifies us for superior usefulness at the bar and in the senate: nor less in religious exercises; it gives a deserved pre-eminence to all who possess it; and a want of it (especially in a seat of learning) is deservedly attended with proportionable ignominy.

Power also is desirable; inasmuch as it may be used for the preservation of due order in society and most beneficially employed in punishing vice and rewarding virtue. Nor are *riches* to be disregarded, for they afford us many opportunities as well of encou-

raging industry, as of relieving the necessitous; and they give full scope for the exercise of our most benevolent affections. Each of them has its peculiar uses; and each is a precious talent capable of the highest improvement. Yet however they lay no solid foundation for glorying: and the prophet's injunction is that we should not glory in them; by which he means, that we are not to esteem them too highly, nor to regard them as the principal objects of our pursuit, nor to place our chief happiness in them, nor to make them our trust and confidence.

And indeed what is there in our *wisdom* wherein to glory? The more knowledge we possess, we are only more fully convinced that we know nothing in comparison of what is yet veiled from our eyes: besides, the wisest counsels are often frustrated for want of power to carry them into execution; and though we excelled even Solomon himself, disease or accident may reduce us in a moment to a level with the brutes.

What is there in *power?* To have it is no little temptation to exercise it in an unbecoming manner and for selfish ends: it universally stirs up opposition in those who are subjected to our authority, and creates much trouble and anxiety to ourselves in the dispensing of it.

And what is there in *riches?* They often generate in our hearts covetous and sordid tempers (for it is seldom that our "riches increase, but we immediately set our hearts upon them"), they make us proud, overbearing, and oppressive: yet all the wealth of the Indies can furnish us with very little more than food and raiment: and there are so many thousand ways in which we may be impoverished, that Solomon observes of riches, "they make themselves wings and fly away."

What ground then is there for glorying in any, or all, of these? There is not any in *wisdom;* for it is limited in its extent, defective in its operations, and uncertain in its continuance. There is not in *might*, for the very possession of it is dangerous, and the

exercise of it vexatious to ourselves and others. There is not in *riches;* for they are defiling in their influence, contracted in their uses, and precarious in their tenure.

Besides all which *in the hour of death* all our thoughts perish, our rank and dignity are annihilated, and our wealth is transferred to another owner. And *in the day of judgment,* not all the wisdom, might, or riches, that ever were possessed by man will be sufficient to bribe our Judge, withstand his power, or elude his search.

Let us proceed then to consider what is the true and sufficient ground of glorying: "Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth."

The knowledge of God as far excels all other attainments, as God, the object of that knowledge, surpasses all created excellencies. But it is not every knowledge of God that lays a foundation for glorying. It is not the knowledge that there is a God; for that is common to the evil angels as well as the good. It is not the knowledge of God from the works of creation; for that comes as much under the observation of heathens as of Christians. But it is a knowledge of God as revealed in the inspired writings. This is strongly intimated in those two expressions in my text, "understandeth" and "knoweth," which are designed to teach us, that it is only in a practical and experimental knowledge of God that we are to glory; or in other words, such knowledge as makes us stand in awe of his majesty, tremble at his threatenings, and seek an interest in his love and favour. Several reasons might be offered for glorying in this rather than in the forementioned possessions or attainments. I will assign three which will comprehend them all: First, because the knowledge of God is not subject to any of those defects, which are almost inseparable from wisdom, might, and riches. *They* are above the reach of far the greater part of mankind; *this* is equally attainable by all: *they* too often debase the mind; *this*

invariably elevates and ennobles it: *they* leave us still longing for something unpossessed; *this* supplies all the wants, satisfies all the desires, and fills all the capacities of our immortal souls: *they*, through the depravity of our nature, often become means and instruments of pride, oppression, and avarice; *this* changes the proud, tyrannical and avaricious man into the image of God in righteousness and true holiness: *they* are destroyed at death; but *this* is perfected.

Again we may glory in this knowledge of God, because it transcends all their excellencies. Human wisdom may enable us to discharge the duties of civil life with advantage; but the knowledge of God rectifies our judgments about things of far greater moment; it makes us both see and feel the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the vanity of time, and the importance of eternity. It teaches us (which is indeed the very essence of wisdom) to pursue the best ends by the fittest means; to seek a crown of glory by a renunciation and abhorrence of every known sin, a firm reliance on the Saviour's merits, and an uniform obedience to his commands. Power also may be improved for the good of the community; but the knowledge of God endues us with might for better purposes; it renders us mighty to resist temptations, mighty to subdue our evil tempers, mighty to mortify our lusts and passions, mighty to endure the bitterest afflictions, and mighty to vanquish the united forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Riches, too, it is granted, are highly beneficial; but the knowledge of God imparts more profitable riches: through *it* we are rich in possession, and in reversion too; it brings into our souls a sense of pardon, it fills us with a peace which passeth all understanding, and entitles us to all the blessings which God himself can bestow: for Solomon, *on making this very comparison*, observes that "wisdom is a defence, and money a defence, but the excellency of *knowledge* (*i.e.* of spiritual knowledge) is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." And a greater than Solomon still more plainly affirms, that "to know God, and Jesus Christ whom

he hath sent, is eternal life; "*i.e.* is the way to it, and the very beginning and earnest of it.

Once more. We may glory in this knowledge of God, because it comprehends and unfolds to our view wisdom, power, and riches that are indeed infinite. The text particularly directs us to consider God as exercising loving-kindness (to his friends), judgment (to his enemies), and righteousness or justice (in the distribution both of his rewards and punishments). Now this is a view of God which we have not any where, but in the Gospel of Christ. In his dealings towards the fallen angels we behold only his judgments; but in his dealings with man we behold the exercise of mercy and loving-kindness, because he accepted the mediation of his Son on our behalf. The Apostle directs us therefore to look for the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*. The intent of the types and prophecies in the *Old* Testament, as well as the historical and epistolary writings in the *New*, is to hold forth Jesus Christ as that illustrious person in whom the Father would be glorified: He therefore, as being "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," is the proper object of our glorying: and so inestimable is the knowledge of Him, that Paul (the most learned and powerful, if not the richest of the Apostles) counted all things as dung and loss in comparison of it. Now the knowledge of this our incarnate God comprehends, I say, and unfolds to our view, wisdom, might, and riches that are indeed infinite. *Infinite wisdom*—In the person, work, and offices of our Lord, are contained mysteries, which, though hid from all eternity in the bosom of the Father, were displayed with the fullest evidence upon the cross. It is true that the doctrine of a crucified Saviour was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but," says the Apostle, "to them that are called, it is the wisdom of God;" or, as he elsewhere terms it, "the wisdom of God in a mystery:" and so indeed it is; for it reconciles things which, to unhumbled, unenlightened persons, would appear contradictory and absurd. It

shews us how sin may be punished, and yet the sinner saved: and *this* too not only without countenancing sin or dishonouring the law, but in such a manner as to bring more honour to the law, than if it never had been broken, and to manifest more indignation against sin, than if the offender had endured its deserved penalty. It shews us also how the divine perfections unite and harmonize in the great work of redemption; how God may pardon those whom he had threatened to destroy, without any violation of his word; and how he may restore rebels to peace, without any infringement of the demands of justice; or, as the Psalmist beautifully expresses it, how "mercy and truth may meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other." It shews us further (which is wonderful indeed) mercy displayed in a way of punishing sin, and justice in a way of pardoning it; yea, *more* mercy than if the whole world had been pardoned without any such atonement, and *more* justice than if the whole human race had been, like their predecessors in iniquity, cast into the depths of hell. In God, as shining forth in the person of his Son, we behold also *infinite might*. Jesus Christ is called by the Apostle "the Wisdom of God and the Power of God," because that, when mankind had destroyed themselves, and not a combination of all created powers could effect their deliverance, his own arm brought salvation. He sustained the dreadful weight of their iniquities in his own body on the tree, and ransomed an apostate world by his own most precious blood. To all appearance indeed he "was crucified through weakness:" he fell a sacrifice to the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, and the rage of an incensed populace: yet by that very fall he bruised the serpent's head and triumphed over principalities and powers. He submitted also to an imprisonment within the bowels of the earth; yet soon burst the gates of death, by which it was not possible he should be detained, and shewed himself to be "the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead."

Infinite riches also are manifested in this our adorable Redeemer. How glorious, how unsearchable were the riches of the Father's love, which rather than we should perish, bestowed, not an angel or archangel, but his only-begotten Son, yea, gave him up for rebels, to the most bitter, ignominious, and accursed death of the cross! How rich was the Son's compassion, to obey that law which we had broken, to humble himself that we might be exalted, to endure the penalties which we had incurred, and to die that we might live for ever! What unbounded mercy! Inasmuch then as this knowledge of God is not subject to the defects that are in wisdom, power, and riches, but transcends their excellencies, and comprehends them all in the highest degree; we may, we ought to glory in it: we cannot value it too highly, we cannot seek it too earnestly, we cannot contemplate it with too exalted joy, or trust in it with too confident assurance: this was evidently the sentiment of the Apostle when he said, "I am determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." And again, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here it will be proper to observe the manner in which the inspired writer prefaces his exhortation in the text; "Thus saith the *Lord*." The voice of the *world* is quite different; even they who are esteemed the wisest in the world hold up wisdom, power, and riches as the grand, if not the only, objects worthy of our pursuit: the whole multitude are following these with unabated ardour: all their affections are set upon them: their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, are excited alternately by these, as the loss or acquisition of them shall give occasion: these are the things most envied and admired: and, when obtained, are ever made the ground of glorying. But the knowledge of God and of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ is deemed scarce worthy our attention. If it were at our option to be the wisest, greatest, and richest person upon earth, but at the same time destitute of this knowledge; or to be endued

with it, but at the same time live in a state of poverty, meanness, and ignorance, how few would shew themselves like-minded with God in this matter! Indeed, how few seek this knowledge at all, or even give it the least place in their thoughts! On the contrary, the generality treat it with contempt; and too many seem to apprehend, that we cannot glory in our God, but we must presently be beside ourselves: but (as says the Apostle) "let God be true, and every man a liar;" let the whole universe combine to extenuate the guilt of neglecting God, and to exalt wisdom, power, and riches, as the chief good of man; their opinions are of no avail: for "thus saith the *Lord*, Let *not* the wise man glory in his wisdom, *neither* let the mighty man glory in his might; let *not* the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in THIS, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth;" that I am He, who will amply and eternally reward those who glory in me, and will assuredly execute judgment upon those who idolize the world. While therefore we pay a just attention to those things which God *allows*, and the interests of society *require* us to pursue, let us take shame to ourselves for having preferred the perishing things of time and sense, to an acquaintance with our God; let us fear lest we be left to take the fruit of our choice, and to have our portion only in this life; let us receive the united testimonies of reason and revelation; and, in compliance with their dictates, let us prize above all things, follow with unwearied assiduity, and supremely delight ourselves in, the knowledge of this Saviour; that through him we may be mighty in subduing our evil habits, rich in faith and good works, and wise unto salvation; so shall we have cause to glory here, and be partakers of everlasting felicity in the world to come. Now to God, &c.[b]

[b] The analysis of this is added, to shew how easily the short skeletons may be formed into entire sermons.

Jer. ix. 23, 24. *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth.*

WE need no other introduction to our subject than that of the prophet[a]—

Bearing in mind therefore the Saviour's repeated admonitions[b], we shall

1. Remove the false and insufficient grounds of glorying—

Wisdom, Power, and *Riches,* are highly esteemed amongst men—

And, if rightly improved, they certainly are valuable talents

[*Wisdom* enables a man to conduct his own affairs with discretion—

It qualifies him also for instructing his fellow-creatures—

It may lead a person to make many valuable discoveries—

Thus it may profit individuals and the community at large—

Might also is useful for the preserving of order in society—

And it may be improved to suppress vice, and encourage virtue—

Riches too may serve for the rewarding of industry—

Or they may be employed in relieving the necessitous—

None of these things therefore ought to be depreciated—]

But they are by no means proper objects of glorying—

To glory in any thing, is, to value it highly, pursue it eagerly, and seek our happiness in it—

But we must not thus glory in *Wisdom*—

[The wisest know that they know but little—

Their best concerted plans they often want power to accomplish—

Disease or accident may soon reduce them to a level with the beasts—]

Nor should we glory thus in *Might*—

[Power is a source of temptation to those who are invested with it—

It indisposes a man to comply with reasonable restraints—

[a] Isai. i. 2. [b] Mark iv. 9, 23

It generally excites opposition in those who are subjected to it—]

Nor are *Riches* at all more worthy objects of our glorying—

[Wealth is very apt to produce covetous and sordid tempers—

It frequently renders its possessors proud and oppressive—

At best it can furnish us with little more than food and raiment—

And we are liable to be deprived of it in a tnousand ways[c]—]

To glory therefore in any of these things would be absurd[d]—

Having removed these common but insufficient grounds of glorying, we shall,

II. Propose such as are true and sufficient—

The knowledge of God in Christ Jesus is the only object of glorying—

[The knowledge that there is a God is not the knowledge here spoken of—

Nor is it the knowledge of God as He is seen in the works of creation—

But the knowledge spoken of in the text is a view of him in redemption—

It is in the Gospel only that God's loving-kindness to his friends appears—

In that too especially He denounces his judgments on his enemies[e]—

And in both He displays equally his unspotted righteousness[f]—

Not that a speculative knowledge even of this will suffice—

The words "understand and know" imply a practical knowledge—]

[c] Prov. xxiii. 5.

[d] Who that considers what *Wisdom* is, would ever glory in it; so limited as it is in its extent—so defective in its operations—and so uncertain in its continuance? Or who in *Might*, the possession of which is so dangerous—and the exercise of which is so vexatious to themselves and others? Or who in *Riches*, which are so defiling in their influence—so contracted in their benefits—and so precarious in their tenure? If to this we add, that all these things perish and depart at death, and are utterly useless in the day of judgment, we can have no doubt but that the prohibition in the text is as reasonable as it is decisive.

[e] Mark xvi. 16.

[f] Ps. lxxxv. 10.

This is a just ground of glorying to all who possess it—

1. It is *free from all the defects* which are found in the foregoing grounds—

[*They* render the mind low and grovelling; *This* elevates and ennobles it—

They never satisfy the soul; *This* affords it perfect satisfaction[g]—

They may become sources of craft, tyranny, and avarice; *This* always changes us into God's image[h]—

They end with our present existence; *This* is perfected at death—]

2. It *transcends all the excellencies* that are in the foregoing grounds—

It imparts *more excellent wisdom*—

[It rectifies our judgments about more important objects—

It teaches us to seek the best ends by the fittest means—]

It endues us with *more excellent might*—

[It renders us mighty to mortify our lusts and passions[i]—

It qualifies us to conflict with all the powers of darkness[k]—]

It conveys to us *more excellent riches*—

[It puts into our hands "the unsearchable riches of Christ"—

It makes us rich in possession, and in reversion too[l]—]

3. It *comprehends all* the foregoing grounds *in the highest degree:*

Wisdom—

[This knowledge of God unfolds the deepest mysteries[m]—

It shews how sin may be punished, and yet the sinner saved—

It shews how *mercy* is exalted *in punishing*, and *justice in rewarding*—]

Might—

[The salvation of a ruined world is a marvellous display of power—

Hence Christ is called "the *Wisdom* of God, and the *Power* of God"—

We have no idea of almighty power, till we know a redeeming God—]

Riches—

g Isai. lv. 2. h 2 Cor. iii. 18. i 2 Cor. x. 3—5.
k Eph. vi. 11, 12. l Eccl. vii. 12. m Col. ii. 2, 3.

[Infinite are the riches of divine grace—
In the glorious mystery of redemption they are all contained—
The knowledge of God exhibits them all to our view[n]—]

In this we cannot possibly glory too much—

[We cannot possibly set too high a value on this knowledge[o]—
We cannot pursue it with too much earnestness—
We cannot delight in it with too exalted joy—
Let us therefore seek to know God as He is revealed in the Gospel—
Let us take encouragement from that declaration of our Lord[p]—
Let the fixed purpose of our hearts resemble that of the Apostle[q]—]

[n] Eph. ii. 7. [o] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [p] John xvii. 3. [q] Gal. vi. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1047

THE CONTEMPT WITH WHICH GOD'S RICHEST MERCIES ARE TREATED.

Jer. xiii. 11. *As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear.*

IT pleased God in former times frequently to instruct his people by signs, as being more calculated to awaken the attention of those who were but, as children, slow to understand the plainest declarations of his word. Sometimes those signs were represented to the prophets in visions: as when Ezekiel was taken up by the hair of his head, and carried to the north gate of the temple to see all the wickedness that was transacted in the sanctuary; the thing was done only in a vision[a]. At other times the prophets actually did the things which were to be signs to the people; as when Ezekiel, for the space of three hundred and ninety days, reclined on his right side, with a representation of Jerusalem before him, to figure to the

[a] Ezek. viii. 3.

Jews the siege that should assuredly be formed against it by the Chaldeans[b]. Whether the sign which Jeremiah was here directed to use was in a vision only, or in reality, commentators are not agreed. Certainly the going repeatedly several hundred miles only to carry a girdle to the Euphrates and bring it back again, seems a labour unlikely to be imposed upon him: but on the other hand, that very labour might tend the more powerfully to awaken the attention of the Jews to the subject which was thus emblematically represented to them: and it is safer, on the whole, to take literally the Scripture account in all cases where reason and common sense do not necessitate us to understand it figuratively[c].

The sign here used by the prophet was this. He took a girdle, and, after wearing it some time, carried it to the river Euphrates, and hid it there in the hole of a rock; and then, after a considerable lapse of time, he went and fetched it back again, and exhibited it to the people in its decayed state; declaring that they, notwithstanding their present strength and power, should ere long be reduced to the lowest ebb of misery by the Chaldeans; because when God had formed them for himself, they had refused to adhere to him, or to regard his overtures of love and mercy.

Such is the explanation given us by God himself in in the words of our text; which, whilst they elucidate the emblem used by the prophet, will naturally lead me to shew you,

I. The honour which God has designed for his people—

The primary use of a girdle is to bind up the garments around the loins—

[In conformity with this idea, God had caused his people to cleave to him, that they might be, as it were, in continual contact with him. This he had caused them to do, when he brought them out of Egypt, and made them altogether dependent on himself for direction, preservation, and support. In

[b] Ezek. iv. 1—17. A most surprising account altogether! See also Ezek. xii. 2—12. and xxiv. 15—24.

[c] Such an instance occurs, Jer. xxv. 27

like manner he may be said to have caused us also to cleave to him, having in our very birth imposed on us a necessity to depend upon him for life, and breath, and all things; for "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Our proper state is that of a little infant clinging to its mother, or, as our text expresses it, "a girdle cleaving to the loins of a man." We should at all times be "taking hold of God by prayer[d]," and by faith uniting ourselves to him, so as to be one with him, and he with us. If this was the duty and privilege of the Jews, much more is it ours; because our God and Saviour has actually assumed our nature, and become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh: nay more, by the fuller communication of his Spirit he "dwells in us," and lives in us, and is "our very life[e];" so that they who are joined unto him by faith are "one Spirit with him[f]." This then, I say, is the honour which God designs for us: he would have us all renouncing every kind and degree of creature dependence, and to live as nigh to him and cleave as close to him, as a girdle to the loins of a man; yea, in spite of every opposition and discouragement, he would have us "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart[g]."]

But a girdle is also of use for ornament—

[And to this our text has especial respect. The girdle of the high-priest was, as it is repeatedly called, "a *curious* girdle," given him "for glory and for beauty[h]:" and our great High-Priest desires that we should be to him what that curious girdle was to Aaron. Vile and worthless as we are in ourselves, he would form and fashion us anew, interweaving in our nature all the graces of his Spirit, and transforming us into the very image of our God in righteousness and true holiness. Surrounded by us, he would esteem himself more richly adorned than with the brightest jewels[i], and more enriched than with all the treasures of the universe[k]. It appears almost impious to say, that such ornaments would be a *glory* to our God and Saviour; yet we will venture to affirm that they would be regarded so by our Lord himself, who says, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them[l]." What a royal diadem is to an earthly monarch, that are we designed to be to the King of kings and Lord of lords[m]. As Christ was "the image of the invisible God," because God who is invisible in his own nature was visible in him[n], so are we according to the measure of grace given unto us: we are to

[d] Isai. lxiv. 7. [e] Col. iii. 4. [f] 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[g] Acts xi. 23. [h] Exod. xxviii. 4, 8, 40.
[i] Mal. iii. 17. [k] Exod. xix. 5, 6. with 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[l] John xvii. 10. See also John xv. 8. and Isai. lxi. 3.
[m] Isai. lxii. 3. [n] Col. i. 15.

"shine as lights in the world, holding forth" in our whole deportment "the word of life[o];" we are made his on purpose that we may "shew forth his *virtues*[p];" we are to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men[q];" and shewing in the whole of our spirit and temper what the will of the Lord is: we are to "have the same mind as was in him[r]," and to "be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord[s]." This will surely become our state, if once we cleave, like a girdle, unto him: and all who see us shall be constrained to "glorify our Father who is in heaven[t]."]

Who would conceive, that when such honour is offered unto man, there should be found a creature in the universe unwilling to accept it? Yet the sequel of our text leads us to shew,

II. The way in which this honour is contemned—

The melancholy testimony that was almost invariably borne against the Jews was, that "they would not hear[u]—

[See how they conducted themselves in relation to the very offer before us! "they refused to hear God's words, and walked in the imagination of their own hearts, and worshipped and served other gods[x]."]

And what can be a more just description of ourselves?

[Unspeakable as the honour is which God desires to confer upon us, we will not seek it at his hands: we are, like those who were invited to the wedding-feast, all with one consent making excuses, and pleading the urgency of our worldly affairs as a reason for neglecting our spiritual concerns[y]. If we bow not down to stocks and stones, we "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator[z]." We have idols in our hearts; and to those we dedicate all our powers and faculties, whether of soul or body. We are justly characterized as "walking after the imagination of our own hearts[a]:" each serves the god that suits him best. One follows all his vicious propensities, and seeks his happiness in sensual indulgence: another grasps after riches; another aspires after honour; another affects rather the more refined pleasures of science and

[o] Phil. ii. 15, 16.
[p] 1 Pet. ii. 9. See the marginal reading.
[q] 2 Cor. iii. 3.
[r] Phil. ii. 5.
[s] 2 Cor. iii. 18.
[t] Matt. v. 16.
[u] Compare with the text, Jer. vi. 16, 17.
[x] ver. 10.
[y] Luke xiv. 16—20.
[z] Rom. i. 25.
[a] See Isai. liii. 6.

philosophy: but all by nature, however differing in their particular pursuits, agree in this, that they "are of the world, and not of God;" and that they "seek honour from man, and not the honour that cometh of God only." They need no exhortation to cleave unto worldly vanities; *that* they do naturally of themselves: and if we could point out to them how to come in closer contact with the objects of their ambition, and how to secure to themselves a larger measure of them, we should find them very attentive to our counsels. But when we exhort them to cleave only to the Lord, they have no ears to hear us, no disposition to regard us. In vain do we expatiate upon the honour which God designs for them; *that* appears to them no better than "a cunningly-devised fable," or at best as a subject that may well be deferred to a more convenient season. "Though we call them to the Most High, none at all will exalt him[b];" so that God may complain of us as he did of his people of old, "All the day long have I stretched out my hands to a rebellious and gainsaying people[c]."]

ADDRESS—

1. In a way of appeal—

[We may justly say to you, "What more could have been done for you than God has done[d]?" and wherefore do you so requite him? Judge, all of you, between God and your own souls, and say what such conduct merits at his hands. I will tell you in God's name what you may assuredly expect. Behold the girdle when it was brought back from the river Euphrates, how "marred and worthless" it was[e]: see too how that emblematic judgment has been executed on the Jewish nation, not only in their Babylonish captivity, but in their present dispersion, where they are "a hissing and an astonishment" to all the rest of the world. So will God's indignation against you be manifested on account of the contempt you pour upon him; according to that express declaration of his, "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." As they who made light of his invitation were "not suffered even to taste of his supper[f]," so you shall never taste of that honour and happiness which he offers to you: and as they were shut out into outer darkness, so will you at the last day awake "to shame and everlasting contempt[g]."]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Nothing does God desire more, than to take even the vilest of mankind, and bind them to him as a girdle. Yes, there is not one so worthless, but he should be made a

[b] Hos. xi. 7. [c] Rom. x. 21. [d] Isai. v. 3, 4.
[e] ver. 7. [f] Luke xiv. 24 [g] Dan. xii. 2.

partaker of this honour, if only he would comply with the invitations of his God. O that every one of us might now obey his voice; and that he would "make us willing in the day of his power!" Would you see more clearly what God would do for you? This same prophet tells you without a figure, that "he will pardon all your iniquities" that ever you have committed, and so load you with his benefits, that all who behold you shall be filled with utter astonishment at his goodness to you[h]. Only resist not his strivings with you, but "run after him when he draws you," and beg him to "fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power: then shall the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in you, and ye shall be glorified in, and with him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ[i]."]

[h] Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9. [i] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

OUTLINE NO. 1048

A CALL TO REPENTANCE[a].

Jer. xiii. 15—17. *Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive.*

REPENTANCE is at all times a proper subject to be enforced; but more especially on a day professedly set apart for national humiliation. The words before us were addressed to the Jews when God was about to send them into captivity in Babylon: and they may well be considered as addressed to us, now that his hand is lifted up for the punishment, and, for aught we know, for the destruction of our land.

They manifestly contain the prophet's exhortation; his arguments to enforce it; and his determination in case he should not be able to prevail on the people to repent.

But the occasion, and the text itself, call rather for exhortation than discussion. We shall therefore,

[a] Preached February, 1801.

though not without a due attention to the order of the words, proceed to urge upon you the great, the seasonable, the indispensable duty of repentance—

[Know then, that it is "*God who speaketh.*" The words delivered to you in his name, as far as they accord with his mind and will, are *his* words, and are to be received as though you heard them uttered by a voice from heaven[b].

"*Hear ye, and give ear,*" and let not the pride of your hearts obstruct your attention. Often has God spoken to you by the dispensations of his providence, and the declarations of his grace; yea, moreover, by the still small voice of conscience: but ye, the generality of you at least, have turned a deaf ear, and refused to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely[c]. But "*be not proud.*" Ye must hear at last, whether ye will or not. Let then your stout hearts be humbled; and receive with meekness the engrafted word[d].

In the name of God we say to you, REPENT. "*Give glory to the Lord your God.*" It is by repentance only that you can do this[e]. Repentance glorifies all his perfections; his omniscience that sees your transgressions, his justice that punishes them, his mercy that pardons them, and his wisdom and goodness that have provided such a marvellous salvation for ruined man.

O glorify his omniscience: say, 'Lord, thou art privy to all the secrets of my heart; thou knowest that I am inexpressibly vile[f].'

Glorify his justice; and acknowledge, that if he cut you off, and consign you to the lowest hell, you have no more than your just desert[g].

Glorify his mercy; and plead it with him as the only, the all-sufficient ground of your hope and confidence[h].

Glorify his wisdom and goodness, that have opened a way for your return to him through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son. Declare that you have no trust whatever but in the blood and righteousness of that almighty Saviour[i].

To persist in impenitence is the certain way to bring down the heaviest judgments upon your souls. The darkness that hangs over the nation[k], cannot be dispelled in any other way; much less can that with which God menaces your souls. O

[b] 2 Cor. v. 20. 1 Thess. ii. 13. [c] Job xxxiii. 14.
[d] Jam. i. 21. [e] Josh. vii. 19. Rev. xvi. 9.
[f] Jer. xvii. 9. Job xl. 4. and xlii. 2, 6.
[g] Matt. xxii. 12, 13. Rom. iii. 4. Ps. cxliii. 2.
[h] Ps. li. 1. [i] Phil. iii. 8, 9.
[k] Joel ii. 2, 3. perhaps a true picture of our present state.

consider "*the darkness, the gross darkness,*" in which they are involved, who are shut up under judicial blindness and final obduracy[l]; or who, under the terrors of a guilty conscience, "*stumble on the dark mountains*" of unbelief, and, like the Jews (who thought they had clean escaped from their pursuers) are overtaken by the sword of vengeance[m], so that "*while they look for light, it is turned into the shadow of death,*" and they are plunged into "the blackness of darkness for evermore[n]."

But repentance may yet avert the storm, both from the nation, and from our own souls. Numberless are the declarations of God to this effect[o]; and numberless the instances wherein it has been verified[p]. But let us remember what kind of repentance it is which will thus prevail: it is not a mere formal confession of sin with a partial reformation of the life, but such a repentance as glorifies all the perfections of the Deity; such a repentance as has an especial respect to Christ, who alone can procure our pardon, and in whom alone we can ever find acceptance with God.

Would to God that we might prevail with you, and that you were all, in good earnest, turning unto God! Could we once behold this, O how should we rejoice: and how would "the very angels in heaven rejoice" on your account! But, "*if ye will not repent,*" (as it is to be feared too many of you will not,) "*my soul,*" and the souls of all who are aware of your condition, "*shall weep in secret places for your pride; yea, our eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears,*" on account of your present and approaching bondage. The godly in all ages have wept over those who felt no concern for their own souls[q]: and we trust that there are many, who will lay to heart the evils which ye are too proud to acknowledge, too obdurate to deplore. But we entreat you to consider, Is there one amongst us all, that is not a sinner before God[r]? and does not the broken law denounce a curse against us[s]? and if God be true, will not that curse be inflicted on the impenitent? Why then will ye not humble yourselves before an offended God, a merciful Redeemer? Alas! for *your* "*pride,*" and stoutness of heart! How lamentable is it, that you, who have been baptized into the name of Christ, and are therefore properly "the Lord's flock," should be so "carried captive" by

[l] Isai. vi. 9, 10. [m] This is the *literal* meaning of the text.
[n] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. Jude, ver. 13.
[o] To nations, 2 Chron. vii. 14; and to individuals, Isai. lv. 7.
[p] Nineveh, the dying thief, &c.
[q] Ps. cxix. 136. Ezra ix. 3. and x. 6. 2 Pet. ii. 8. Rom. ix 1, 2; above all, Luke xix. 41.
[r] 1 Kings viii. 46. Jam. iii. 2. [s] Gal. iii. 10.

your lusts, and by your great adversary, the devil[t]! O think, it is but a little time and your captivity will be complete; and, lost beyond a possibility of redemption, you will be bound in chains of everlasting darkness[u]. And is not here a cause for sorrow on your account? "O that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" for your unhappy state[x]!

We will not, however, conclude, without once more entreating you to "give glory to the Lord your God;" that so "your light may rise in obscurity, and your darkness may be as the noon-day[y]."]

[t] 2 Tim. ii. 26. [u] Jude, ver. 6.
[x] Jer. ix. 1. [y] Isai. lxviii. 8, 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1049

THE POWER OF EVIL HABITS.

Jer. xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

OF any particular *acts* which we have done amiss, we have been conscious: they have, as it were, obtruded themselves upon our notice, and we could not turn our eyes from them: but of an evil *principle* operating within us, we have been strangely insensible; though, if we had been at all observant of our daily *habits*, we could not but have both seen and felt it. It is owing to this that we have, for the most part, so high a conceit of our own sufficiency for what is good. We imagine that we have but to make a resolution, and any change which we propose will take place of course: but experience shews, that our habits of sin are not so easily broken, nor our resolutions respecting holiness so easily carried into effect. The truth is, that "the Ethiopian may as soon change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as we, by any power of our own, get into a course of what is good, after having been so long and so habitually accustomed to do evil."

From the words before us, I will take occasion to point out,

I. The power of sin, as inherent in our nature—

No wonder that we are entirely led captive by it: for,

1. It pervades all our faculties, whether of mind or body—

[Our understanding is blinded by it; our will is rendered perverse; our affections are made earthly and sensual; our conscience is stupefied; and our very memory is enfeebled with respect to every thing truly good. By it, also, is the whole of our body defiled. St. Paul, with a remarkable particularity, specifies the subjection of our several members to this evil principle, from head to foot[a]: so that what the prophet speaks of the Jewish people, may well be said of us: "From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in us; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores[b]." The whole man is corrupt; insomuch that "every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil continually[c];" and "all our members are instruments of unrighteousness unto sin[d]."]

2. It finds in us nothing to counteract its influence—

[True indeed, man, in his fallen state, possesses both reason and conscience: but neither of these perform their office, in opposing the evil principle within us, any farther than to testify against such flagrant acts as may expose us to shame before men. I deny not, but that there are at times some secret stirrings in the mind, even at a very early period of life; some remonstrances against sin; and some intimations that we ought to serve our God. But these arise not from any remnant of good in our fallen nature: they are the fruits of divine grace, produced by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul; even of that blessed Spirit who wrought on Samuel, and John, and Timothy, from the very womb. The Scripture says expressly, that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing[e]:" we cannot so much as *will* what is good, and much less *do* it, unless God work within us to that end[f]; "nor have we a sufficiency even to think a good thought[g]," unless it be put into our hearts by the only Giver of all good. In reference to all spiritual exercises, reason and conscience are rather on the side of the corrupt principle; justifying, rather than condemning, the neglect of them; and substituting in their place such services as are altogether unworthy of Him who "claims to be worshipped in spirit and in truth."]

[a] Rom. iii. 12—15. [b] Isai. i. 6. [c] Gen. vi. 5.
[d] Rom. vi. 13. [e] Rom. vii. 18. [f] Phil. ii. 13.
[g] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

3. It receives aid from every thing around us—

["All that is in the world" is comprehended by the Apostle under these three designations; "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life[h]." And what are these, but confederates of the evil principle within us, giving it continually fresh scope for exercise, and soliciting it in every possible way to enslave our souls? Every thing we see, every thing we hear, has a tendency to draw us from God, to gratify our corrupt nature, and to give to the evil principle within us an advantage against us to our destruction. Even the Saviour himself, whilst to God's elect "he is made a sanctuary," is, to those who are destitute of divine grace, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, yea, as a gin and a snare, whereby multitudes stumble and fall, and are broken and snared, and taken[i]."]

4. It conceals its influence under specious names—

[There is not an evil which the corrupt principle does not lead us to palliate by some gentle name, whilst on vital godliness it invariably casts reproach. What will it not commend to us, under the idea of innocent amusement? and what will it not sanction, under the terms conviviality and good breeding? Covetousness, worldliness, ambition, yes, and licentiousness itself, all lose their hateful qualities under the less offensive terms of prudence, and honour, and youthful indiscretion.

Is it any wonder, then, that men are led captive by sin and Satan, and that godliness is in so great a degree banished from the world?]

But, to get a just notion of this evil principle, we must yet further mark,

II. Its power, as augmented and confirmed by evil habit—

Habit is to us as a second nature: and by it, sin is greatly augmented and confirmed.

1. Its odiousness is diminished—

[I have already said, that there are certain acts of sin which, notwithstanding their general approbation of it, men are agreed to stigmatize as evil; and into these, men do not plunge themselves, without some checks of conscience, and some remorse after they have fallen into the commission of them. And, if a person were warned that he was in danger of abandoning himself to these, he would be ready to reply,

[h] 1 John ii. 16. [i] Isai. viii. 14, 15. with 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing[k]?" But we see to what lengths of wickedness men will proceed, when once these restraints are broken through; and how they will even come at last to "glory in their shame[l]." Who that walk the streets with shameless impudence, or that addict themselves to theft and robbery till they bring themselves to an untimely end, would ever have believed, that sin, which, when first committed, caused in them a blush of conscious guilt, should ever be carried by them to such a fearful extent, and be familiarized to them as their inseparable companion?]

2. Its power is strengthened—

[It is of the very nature of habit to strengthen the principle that is called into action, whether it be good or bad. The mind, the memory, the judgment, are strengthened by exercise; as the bodily organs are also: and they acquire a facility in doing things which at first are difficult. And thus it is also with evil habits: a man may have so accustomed himself to anger, intemperance, impurity, or sloth, that he shall not be able to withstand the smallest temptation: every trifle will irritate him; every opportunity of indulgence ensnare him; "his eyes will be so full of adultery, that he cannot cease from sin[m];" and "on his bed he shall become like a door upon its hinges," that knows of no motion but from one side to another[n]. This is placed in a peculiarly strong point of view by our blessed Lord, who tells us that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God[o]." And wherefore is this? It is because his habits of indulgence have so enslaved him, that he cannot overcome them; nor can any thing but Omnipotence itself effect his deliverance[p].]

3. Its opportunities for exercise are multiplied—

[Habit calls around us those persons and temptations that are most subservient to its indulgence. The man of pleasure moves in a round of gaiety and amusement. The man who is in the pursuit of wealth, is to be found, wherever his favourite object may be best accomplished. The man who affects pre-eminence and distinction, is ever prosecuting his plans by such methods as lie within his reach. Thus all put themselves in the very way of temptation, and of indulging the sin which most easily besets them. If they even fled from the occasions of sin, they would be in great danger: but when they accumulate to themselves occasions of falling, and lay continually stumbling-blocks in their own way, it is no wonder

[k] 2 Kings viii. 13. [l] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [m] 2 Pet. ii. 14.
[n] Prov. xxvi. 14. [o] Matt. xix. 24. [p] Matt. xix. 26.

that they fall. For, "can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt[q]?" So if, instead of watching against temptation, we court it, and rush into it, and familiarize ourselves with it, there can be no hope but that we shall fall and perish. "A bird hasting to the snare, is not more sure of ruin than we[r]."]

4. The powers whereby it should be resisted are destroyed—

[We have before said, that against enormous wickedness there are some barriers, arising from conscience, and a desire of man's applause. But by habits of sin, "the conscience becomes seared as with a hot iron," and is rendered altogether incapable of discharging its proper office[s]. A fear of detection, or of God's displeasure, may sometimes operate to restrain from great iniquity: but the mind may become altogether "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin[t]," till we resemble those of whom the prophet speaks in a preceding chapter: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return[u]." What can be expected of such persons, but that they will "wax worse and worse[x]," and continue "treasuring up wrath," till it shall come upon them to the uttermost?"]

5. Every thing that is good is put, by it, at an unapproachable distance—

["How shall they DO GOOD that have been accustomed to do evil?" If "the putting off the old man" be so difficult, what hope is there of such persons "putting on the new[y]"? The loving, serving, honouring of God, are things which come not into the mind of one who is addicted to the commission of evil: in this sense, "God is not in all his thoughts[z]." And if any man think that of himself he can turn unto the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth, let him first *wash an Ethiopian white;* and then he may hope to accomplish the task of converting his own soul, and of "creating himself anew after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness."]

LEARN then, beloved,

1. Your need of converting grace—

[You need it for the subjugation of sin, and much more for the implantation of holiness in your souls. Yes, indeed,

[q] Prov. vi. 27, 28. [r] Prov. vii. 22, 23 [s] 1 Tim. iv. 2.
[t] Heb. iii. 13. [u] Jer. v. 3. [x] 2 Tim. iii. 13.
[y] Eph. iv. 22—24. [z] Ps. x. 4.

Brethren, "you must be born again, and be made new creatures in Christ Jesus." No power, but that which formed the universe at first, can ever make you what you ought to be; and what you must be, if ever you would behold the face of God in peace — — —]

2. The difference between sin and grace, as affected by our habits—

[You have seen the terrible effect of habit in relation to sin. But it is far different in relation to grace: for though it is true that gracious habits render the exercise of grace more easy, they will never, in any degree, supersede the need of fear and watchfulness. Behold David, the man after God's own heart: he catches but a glimpse of Bathsheba, and what becomes of all his gracious affections? See Peter, also, who was so bold that he would die with his Divine Master: a maiden does but point him out as a follower of his Lord, and he denies him with oaths and curses. The truth is, that habits of sin increase the corrupt bias that is in the soul, and render its departure from a right line more easy and more certain than it was before: but habits of grace are only like an augmenting of a man's power to roll a stone up hill: but if he intermit his labour, whatever advance he may have made, the stone will instantly roll down, and he will have all his labour to begin again. "Let him, then, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall[a]." Still has the most eminent amongst us "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit lusting against the flesh[b]." Yes, and still has the corrupt principle within him the force of "a law, which wars against the law of his mind, and brings him more or less into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members[c]." And this I say to humble you, and to put you on your guard. Yet, let not any of you be discouraged: for "the grace of Christ is amply sufficient for you," if you will but seek it; "nor shall any temptation occur to you without a way to escape, that so "you may be able to bear it[d]." Be weak, then, in yourselves, and "strong in the Lord[e]:" so shall "his strength be perfected in your weakness[f]," and his name be glorified in your salvation.]

[a] 1 Cor. x. 12. [b] Gal. v. 17. [c] Rom. vii. 23.
[d] 1 Cor. x. 13. [e] Eph. vi. 10. [f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

OUTLINE NO. 1050

GOD IS DESIROUS OF SAVING MEN.

Jer. xiii. 27. *Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?*

THROUGHOUT all the sacred writings we behold the goodness and severity of God: sometimes the one attracts our notice, and sometimes the other; and in many places, as in that before us, we are struck with the union and combination of them both. Jerusalem was the city of the living God, the residence of his peculiar people; yet he denounces woe against them: but at the same time he declares, in very pathetic language, the ardent desires of his soul to exercise mercy towards them.

From these most affecting words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The woes which impenitent sinners have reason to expect—

This is a painful, but necessary, subject of our inquiries—

The punishment that awaits sinners is most tremendous—

[The loss of heaven is one part of it: and who shall declare how great a loss this is? ——— The miseries of hell (which is the other part) are equally beyond the powers of language to describe, or of imagination to conceive ———]

This, however, the impenitent have but too much reason to expect—

["Woe unto thee!" says my text: and this is the voice of reason[a]——— of Scripture[b]——— of experience[c]——— of the compassionate Saviour himself[d]——— What stronger evidence can any man wish for? and how blind must he be that is not convinced by it!]

But however merited and awful these woes are, we see from the text,

II. How unwilling God is to inflict them—

He complains of men's obstinacy in rejecting the overtures of his mercy—

[a] There must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked.

[b] Against ten thousand passages to this effect, there is not one syllable that has an opposite aspect.

[c] The union of sin and misery is felt by all. Where is there a sinner that is truly happy? See Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

[d] See how often woe is denounced, Matt. xxiii. 13—16, 23, 25, 27, 29, 33.

[It is their sin only that exposes them to his displeasure: were that once removed, he would "rejoice over them to do them good." And whence is it that they are not cleansed from it? Has not God provided such means for their cleansing, as should certainly be effectual, if only they were applied? Has he not opened a fountain to cleanse them from guilt[e]? ——— Has he not promised to sprinkle them with water that should purify and renew their very inmost souls[f]? ——— Yes: but they are averse to that purification: they hate the very means by which it is to be attained, and the regimen whereby it is to be preserved ——— God would gladly effect the work for them, if only they would submit to it; but they will not[g]. Hence those complaints so often uttered by the prophets[h], and by Christ himself[i] ———]

He expresses also an impatient longing for an opportunity to bless their souls—

[Long has he waited to no purpose: yet still "he waiteth to be gracious unto us:" "he stands at the door of our hearts, and knocks." His address to us is, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will we die, O house of Israel?" Every day appears to him an age[k]: he is at a loss, as it were, what to do, whether to give us up, or to use any further means[l]. The complaint in the text is scarcely less the language of despondency than of compassion; "When shall it once be?" It is as though he said, 'My patience is almost exhausted: your return to me is the most earnest desire of my soul: but I fear I shall be forced, in spite of all my efforts to save you, to abandon you at last, and to execute the judgments which you so obstinately provoke.']

ADDRESS—

1. Those who imagine that they have no need of cleansing—

[What child of man has not need to be cleansed from that taint which we inherit from our first parents[m]? And who has not contracted much moral defilement by means of actual transgression? ——— Let none entertain such proud conceits. The best amongst us, no less than the worst, need to be washed in the blood of Christ, and be renewed by his Spirit; and, without this cleansing, must inevitably perish.]

[e] Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7. [f] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[g] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [h] Ps. lxxxi. 11—13. Jer. vii. 23—26
[i] John v. 40. Matt. xxiii. 37.
[k] Hos. viii. 5. Jer. xv. 6. "I am weary with repenting."
[l] Hos. vi. 4. and xi. 8. Jer. iii. 4, 19.
[m] Job xiv. 4. and xv. 14. and xxv. 4.

2. Those who are unwilling to be cleansed—

[Many are unwilling to part with even the grossest lusts. What then must we say to them? Must we speak peace to them, instead of denouncing woes? If we were to do so, God would not confirm our word: so that we should only delude them to their ruin. But indeed they themselves would not be deluded by any such assertions: for, with whatever confidence they utter them themselves, they would not endure to hear them if uttered from the pulpit.

But it is not gross sin only that must be put away: we must be "cleansed also from secret faults:" whatever stops short of this, is ineffectual. The right hand, the right eye, must be sacrificed; and the whole heart be turned unto God — — —]

3. Those who desire the cleansing of their souls—

[It is of infinite importance that you seek this blessing aright. It is not in floods of tears that you are to be cleansed; though floods of tears are proper and desirable: it is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from the guilt of sin; and the Spirit of Christ alone that can cleanse from the power and pollution of sin. To apply these effectually, we must embrace the promises, and rest upon them, trusting in God to accomplish them to our souls. We must not first cleanse ourselves, and then embrace God's promises of mercy; but first lay hold on the promises, and then, by virtue derived from them, proceed to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit[n]."]

[n] 2 Cor. vii. 1. with Acts xv. 9.

OUTLINE NO. 1051

GOD'S NAME THE SINNER'S PLEA.

Jer. xiv. 7. *O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake.*

PRAYER is both our duty and our privilege: and God often suffers trials to come upon his people, in order to stir them up to prayer, and to manifest himself to them in a more conspicuous manner as "a God that heareth prayer." On some occasions, indeed, he has forbidden his people to intercede with him; as when he said to Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against these idolaters, and that I may consume them." But, in such cases, the

prohibition has not been considered as absolute, but rather in a qualified sense; as intimating only, that any petitions offered under those particular circumstances could scarcely be expected to prevail; yet as implying a permission to the person to make the attempt. Certainly Moses understood it thus; for he, notwithstanding the prohibition, besought the Lord for Israel, and enforced his petitions with the most powerful pleas; and never ceased from urging his requests, till he obtained an answer of peace[a]. The Prophet Jeremiah, in like manner, was repeatedly forbidden to intercede for Judah and Jerusalem: "Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee[b]." Yet the prophet could not forbear; but urged his pleas with all imaginable tenderness and compassion[c]. He acknowledged, that the sins which had provoked God to anger were great and undeniable: but though he could find no excuse for Israel, he could find a plea in the very character of God: and therefore he entreated him to do, for *his own sake*, what he could not venture to ask *for theirs*.

In respect of outward circumstances, we at this day do not resemble the Jews; yet, *as sinners*, we need to make the same acknowledgments, and to offer the same pleas, as are recorded in our text.

Let us then, with a more immediate application of the passage to our own case, consider,

I. The sinner's acknowledgment—

The prophet's confession is precisely such as befits the world at large—

[Verily, their iniquities do "testify against them, even to their face[d]." Their whole lives shew that they have not the fear of God before their eyes. It is impossible to see their conduct, and not feel the force of this melancholy truth[e]. If it be said, that "they *cannot* serve the Lord;" I reply, "They will *not frame their doings to turn* unto the Lord[f]." There

[a] Exod. xxxii. 10—14.
[b] Jer. vii. 16. and xi. 14.
[c] ver. 7—9.
[d] Hos. vii. 10.
[e] Ps. xxxvi. 1.
[f] Hos. v. 4, 5.

is much which they might do, and yet will not do. They might abstain from many things which they wilfully commit; and might perform many duties which they wilfully neglect. They might put themselves into the way of receiving good to their souls, by reading the Scriptures, and other religious books, in private; by a more diligent attendance on public ordinances; and by conversation with persons capable of instructing them in the things of God. But their contempt of all religious advantages, and the determined preference given by them to the things of time and sense, clearly prove the language of their hearts to be, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."]

With too great reason, also, may it be adopted, even by the best of men—

[There is doubtless an immense difference between the godly and the world at large: for whilst the world are willing slaves of sin and Satan, the godly resist to the uttermost their spiritual enemies, and maintain, on the whole, a successful warfare against them. But though "the Spirit in them lusts against the flesh, the flesh still lusts and fights against the Spirit; so that they neither do, nor can do, the things that they would[g]." I would ask of all, Whether their consciences do not bear testimony, that yet there is much amiss within them; and that they have yet much to deplore, in respect of *commission*, and especially in sins of *omission* and *defect?* Who amongst us have not reason to confess, that, on some occasions, through impatience or inadvertence, they have been betrayed into tempers which were unbecoming their holy profession? And who, through weakness and infirmity, have not given way to sloth and negligence in the secret exercises of the closet? And who, if they compare their very best duties with the holy requirements of the Law, and the boundless obligations of the Gospel, have not reason to blush and be confounded before God? Verily, the very best amongst us may well say with the prophet, "Our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and, as for our iniquities, we know them[h]."]

But are we, therefore, without hope? By no means: for, together with these acknowledgments, we are free to offer,

II. The sinner's plea—

The particular request which the prophet offered is not specified: but, in accordance with the subsequent part of his address, we may suppose it to have

[g] Gal. v. 17. [h] Isai. lix. 12.

been for the restoration of God's favour. For this we also may ask, not indeed on account of any thing that is in us, but solely for the sake of God's honour, and for the glory of his name.

This plea is open for all—

[God's honour is deeply involved in his dealings with us. His justice and his holiness require him to manifest his abhorrence of sin, and his indignation against it: but his mercy inclines him to receive the mourning penitent, and to pardon his transgressions, however greatly they may have been multiplied against him: and if he were to spurn from his footstool a repentant sinner, he would consider himself as acting in a way that was unbecoming his divine character. He esteems the exercise of mercy as his highest glory, and his chief delight. And, when he can find nothing in his creatures to call forth, or even to justify, his kindness towards them, he takes the motive from within his own bosom, and shews mercy towards them for his own name's sake. It was from this motive only that he brought his people out of Egypt, and conducted them in safety to the Promised Land. "Not for any righteousness of theirs" did he display his mercy towards them[i]; but, as he repeatedly tells them, "he wrought for his name's sake[k]." Seeing, then, that he has shewn such a regard for his own honour, it cannot be, but that he should be pleased when he sees a similar concern in us, and hears us urging it with him as our only plea. But that we may not found this on mere conjecture, let me refer you to an instance wherein this plea was urged exactly in the way that was most pleasing to God. On an occasion wherein God had appeared to have forsaken his people, Joshua addressed him in these memorable words: "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name[l]?" Here then we see, that, however much we may have provoked God to anger, and whatever reason we may have to fear that he is become our enemy, we may still approach him with this plea, and entertain a good hope that we shall find acceptance with him.]

This plea shall never be urged in vain—

[In the instance just mentioned, it was attended with good success. The Lord immediately answered Joshua, "Get thee up: wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath

[i] Deut. ix. 5. [k] Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22. [l] Josh. vii. 8, 9.

sinned[m];" and on the putting away of their sin, I will return in mercy towards them. A yet more striking instance we have in the intercession of Moses for Israel, when God had determined to consume them on account of their worshipping of the golden calf. Moses pleaded with him the oath by which he had bound himself to Abraham and his seed; and immediately "the Lord repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto them[n]." Will not, then, the same plea be efficacious still; or rather, I should say, be, if possible, far more efficacious, now that we can plead the name of Jesus? Hear what Jesus himself has said: "*Whatsoever* ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *any thing* in my name, I will do it[o]." Here is no limitation, no exception: nay more, the very glory of God is pledged for the fulfilment of this promise, and shall be advanced in its accomplishment.]

The passage, thus opened, affords me a peculiarly fit occasion to DECLARE,

1. What should be the effect of sin upon the soul—

[That it should humble us, will be universally acknowledged. But to many it appears as if it were a proper ground for dejection and despondency; and more especially when it has been committed by one who has been numbered with the Israel of God. But I would wish the terms of my text to be very particularly noticed; for in them the plea is urged in the very face of all the iniquities that had been committed: "*Though our iniquities testify against us*, do thou it for thy name's sake." Here you will see that conviction of sin is, not to *keep us from* God, but to *bring us to* him. We must on no account give way to discouragement, as though our sins were too great to be forgiven, or as though it were presumptuous in such sinners to draw nigh to God. Presumptuous it would be, if we were to seek any plea from ourselves: but it cannot be so when our plea is derived from God alone. One or two passages of Scripture will place this matter in a clear and beautiful light. David prays, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity: for it is great[p]." And again, "Iniquities prevail against me: but as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away[q]." Here he makes the greatness of his sins a reason for his more earnest application to God, and for his more entire affiance in him. Let us then learn a truth but little known, and a truth on which our spiritual welfare most essentially depends; namely, That *sin is a just ground*

[m] Josh. vii. 10, 11. [n] Exod. xxxii. 9—14.
[o] John xiv. 13, 14. [p] Ps. xxv. 11. [q] Ps. lxv. 3.

for humiliation, but not for discouragement. In our first conversion to God, we must come as the chief of sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in him as both able and willing to save us to the uttermost. And is there any other way for us to come to God at a subsequent period? I know of none. Whether our sins be many or few, we *may* come as sinners, and we *must* come as sinners; founding all our hopes, not on any righteousness of our own, but on the multitude of his tender mercies[r]. The mercy of God is our only hope, from first to last: and though *we* may have changed, *He* changeth not: nor is the way of access to him through the Son of his love closed against us. Let me not be misunderstood, as if I meant by these observations to speak lightly of sin; for sin, indulged and unrepented of, will infallibly destroy the soul: but we must be aware of a *legal spirit;* and guard against the idea, that the possession of any personal worthiness entitles us to God's favour, or that the want of it is a barrier to our acceptance with him. From first to last our hope is in Christ alone; and his name, as it is our only plea, so shall it be effectual, if it be urged in humility and faith. Let this, then, be remembered by every mourning soul, that *sin is a ground of humiliation, but not of discouragement.* It is not possible for us to be too deeply humbled: but, on the other hand, it is not possible to hold fast too strongly our hope and confidence in God.]

2. What shall surely be effectual to remove it from the soul—

[Prayer, fervent and believing prayer, shall infallibly succeed at last. Where do we find an instance of a weeping penitent spurned from the footstool of the Lord? Never, never did a repenting sinner pour out his cries in vain. Only we must remember the requisites of acceptable prayer. It must be *humble and contrite.* We must "acknowledge our iniquity," and our desert of God's judgments on account of it[s]. It must be *fervent and persevering,* like that of Daniel: "O my God, incline thine ear, and hear! for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken, and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God[t]!" It must be offered solely *in dependence on God's promised mercies in Christ Jesus:* "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, *for thy name's sake;* do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, *break not thy covenant*

[r] Ps. li. 1. [s] Jer. iii. 12, 13, 25. [t] Dan. ix. 18, 19.

with us[u]." The truth is, that God has solemnly engaged that "he will not cast out one who comes to him in his Son's name[x];" and sooner shall "heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail."]

[u] ver. 20, 21. [x] John vi. 37.

OUTLINE NO. 1052

A PATTERN FOR NATIONAL HUMILIATION[a].

Jer. xiv. 7—9. *O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee: O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name: leave us not.*

NATIONAL humiliation is the only mean of averting national judgments: it is that which God himself has prescribed; and to which he has often given the most signal success. The repentance, and consequent deliverance of Nineveh, a heathen nation, stands as an encouragement to all the kingdoms of the earth. The instances of God's regard to the united supplications of his people are so numerous, that it has ever been judged expedient to appoint days for general fasting and prayer, in seasons of great calamity. Surely such an appointment was never more necessary than now! To assist you in improving this solemn occasion, we shall propose to your imitation the Jews, who, in a season of grievous drought and famine, humbled themselves before God. In the words before us, we see,

I. Their humble acknowledgments—

Conscious of having merited the Divine judgments, they confessed their guilt—

And may not we justly adopt their language as our own?

[a] For a Fast-Day—Drought, &c.

[" We have sinned against God " as much as any people upon earth: " our backslidings have been very many," and " our iniquities do indeed testify against us." Look through the land; see what profaneness everywhere abounds! — — — We have indeed professed on many solemn fast-days to repent, and turn unto the Lord; but our humiliation has not survived the day appointed for it, nor has any national reformation been visible amongst us — — — If we enter, every one of us, into our own hearts, we may see an epitome of all that is passing in the world: we may say with the Psalmist, "My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly[b]" — — —What ingratitude for mercies, what impenitence under sin, what unmindfulness of God's presence, what disregard of his word, what evil dispositions, corrupt affections, and vile propensities, may be laid to our charge! — — — Let any one say, Whether these and innumerable other sins, do not testify against him — — —We would hope that there are but few amongst us who have not resolved, and for a time endeavoured, to repent: but has not our " goodness been as the morning-cloud, or the early dew that passeth away?" Have not our " backslidings been multiplied?" And could we have thought, some years ago, that we should have made so small a progress in the Divine life, or, perhaps, that we should at this day have been as far from God as ever? — — — Let us then make these acknowledgments to God with most unfeigned contrition, and lie before him in dust and ashes.]

With equal propriety also we may imitate,

II. Their mournful expostulations—

Nothing indeed can be more offensive to God than arrogant expostulations[c]; but nothing more acceptable than such as are presented with unfeigned humility—

Such were those with which the Jewish penitents addressed the Lord—

[The titles, by which they address the Deity, are expressive of the deepest reverence: God is indeed the hope, the *only* " hope of his people:" and he is their *willing* and *all-sufficient* " Saviour in the time of trouble." Nor did they intend to question either his *inclination* or *ability* to save them; but only to say, Wilt thou be like a stranger that cares not for us; or like one, who, though mighty in himself, is yet, through perturbation of his mind, or the insuperable difficulty of the case, unable to afford succour? Similar expostulations were frequently used by David[d]; and however they may at first

[b] Ps. xxxvi. 1. Prayer-Book Translation. [c] Isai. lviii. 3.
[d] Ps. xliv. 23—27. and lxxiv. 10, 11.

sight appear expressive of too great familiarity, are indeed the genuine effusions of a contrite soul—]

Let us approach our God in terms of like import—

[To whom can we look as our "Hope," but Jehovah? and who but he has been our "*Saviour in times of trouble?*" But, alas! He is at present but as "a stranger in the land, or as a mighty man that cannot save." We have cried to him, and we are not delivered: though he has graciously interposed on some occasions, yet still we are left in deep affliction; nor can we at all divine what shall be the issue of our troubles. The greater part of us too, we fear, are no less in doubt respecting the issue of their *spiritual* conflicts: If they have ever cried to God, their enemies yet prevail; and it is uncertain whether they shall not finally be overwhelmed by sin and Satan. With what earnestness, then, should *they* look to Christ, as to "*the hope* set before them," and plead with him as their *Saviour* in this hour of need!]

But to their expostulations let us not forget to add,

III. Their fervent petitions—

The penitents before us seemed conscious as well of their unworthiness as of their impotency—

Hence, both in their petitions and their pleas, they expressed their entire reliance upon God's grace and mercy—

[Sensible, that if God forsook them, or refused his aid, they must perish, they cried, "Leave us not!" "Do thou it" which we desire: and having no goodness or worthiness of their own to plead, they entreated him "for his name's sake," and because of his presence with them, and his relation to them; "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name: leave us not!"]

A more excellent pattern for our imitation we cannot find—

[What can we do *as a nation*, if God forsake us, or withhold his powerful interposition? In vain will our fleets and armies go forth to meet the enemy, if God be not with them, to succeed their efforts. But can we plead the superior piety of our nation? Is there any thing in the land so excellent, that we can urge it with God as a ground whereon we may expect his favour? Alas! the superior light of which we boast, and the distinguished blessings which we enjoy, have greatly aggravated our national guilt: we can therefore ask nothing but mercy, for mercy's sake. It is true, "God is still (blessed be his name!) in the midst of us;" and while our enemies have

professedly cast off their allegiance to him[e], we glory in being "called by his name." In this view we may plead his presence with us, and his relation to us; yet not in a spirit of proud boasting, but of humble and thankful acknowledgment. And the more God is honoured in the midst of us, the more may we expect a continuance of his favour towards us.

It is almost needless to observe, that, with respect to our *personal* necessities, we must have no other plea than that before mentioned. He must be ignorant indeed who will presume to ground his hopes upon any merit of his own; though certainly, if we belong to God, we may plead his past mercies as a ground on which we hope for the continuance and increase of them. In this manner therefore let us approach our God; and we may rest assured that our supplications shall not go forth in vain.]

APPLICATION—

[Let this day be truly set apart for the humbling of your souls before God — — — And let the pattern now set before you be not only approved, but imitated in all its parts. There is a day coming when we shall either look back upon our present humiliation with unspeakable comfort, or regret bitterly that we trifled with God and our own souls. Defer not then this necessary work. The nation, of which you are members, demands it of you. Whatever be your judgment with respect to politics, there can be no doubt but that you have contributed to augment the guilt of the nation, and are therefore bound to deprecate the judgments that are hanging over it. The salvation of your own souls too depends on your unfeigned repentance; and the sooner you turn to God in his appointed way, the sooner will you obtain a sense of his favour, and the brighter will be your prospects in the heavenly world. Let us all then turn to Christ, as the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof: and however unable or unwilling to save we may have foolishly supposed him, we shall find him both "able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

[e] The time of the French Revolution.

OUTLINE NO. 1053

HOW TO PLEAD WITH GOD.

Jer. xiv. 20, 21. *We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us.*

"LORD, teach us to pray," was the request of the Apostles to their Lord and Master: and may Almighty God teach us to pray, whilst we consider the passage we have just read. Here is prayer *indeed*, such as it becomes us all to offer; and such as we shall surely offer, if ever we be duly sensible of our state before God. It was offered by the prophet in a season of great affliction. The whole land was in the utmost distress by reason of a drought, which put a total stop to vegetation, and destroyed all the fruits of the earth: and the prophet was assured, that that distress would speedily become extreme by means of the Chaldeans, who would invade the country, and desolate Jerusalem with the sword and famine. Under these circumstances, he was commanded not to pray for the people, since the measure of their iniquities was full[a]. But, like Moses of old[b], the prophet could not forbear: he first indeed warned the people of the judgments which God was about to inflict upon them[c], and then, in a most earnest and humble manner, pleaded with God in their behalf[d].

We propose,

I. To explain this prayer of the prophet—

His *acknowledgments* are plain and easy to be understood—

[He confesses, as he might well do, the sins of the whole nation; as well those contracted by their ancestors, as those which they had themselves committed: and he entreats God "not to abhor them" on account of their extreme wickedness. Now this expression, whilst it marked his sense of their vileness, had particular reference to what God himself had *threatened* by Moses, and to what he had *promised* also in the event of their humbling of themselves before him[e]. Hence, in the verse before the text, the prophet asks, "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul *lothed Zion?*"]

His *pleas* require some explanation—

[a] ver. 10, 11. [b] Exod. xxxii. 10, 11.
[c] ver. 15—18. [d] ver. 19—22.
[e] Lev. xxvi. 10—12. with 27—30; in both of which passages especial mention is made of famine as connected with God's abhorrence.

[Being exceedingly earnest in his petitions, he offers the most powerful pleas that could possibly be urged: he entreats God to have mercy on them for his own sake, and to shew regard to the *honour of his name*, the *glory of his administration*, and the *sanctity of his engagements*.

The first of these pleas, the honour of God' name, is frequently urged in the Holy Scriptures[f], and is particularly acceptable to God; who "is jealous for his holy name[g]," and delights to sanctify it" in the sight of an ungodly world[h].

The second of these pleas involves in it somewhat of greater difficulty. The words, "Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory," are generally interpreted as importing no more than this;" 'Do not give up the city and temple into the hands of the enemy.' The words will undoubtedly bear this sense: for both the city and the temple are represented as God's throne[i]; and he threatens to give them up into the hands of his enemies to be polluted and defiled by them[k]. But, if we attend to the manner in which this petition is introduced, we shall see that it is, like that which precedes, and that which follows it, *a plea;* in which view its sense will be, 'Thou art our King, who art engaged to provide for and protect thy people; and if thou give up the city and the temple into the hands of our enemies, as thou hast threatened, thy government will be dishonoured; and they will say, that thou art not able to afford them the succour which thou hast promised them.' In this view the passage exactly accords with the plea urged by Moses[l], and with that also which Jeremiah himself has urged more fully, and in the very same connexion, in the preceding part of this chapter[m].

The last of these pleas reminds God of his covenant, which he cannot, and will not, break. This must doubtless refer to the covenant of grace, which God made with Abraham and with all his believing people to the end of time[n]. The *national* covenant that was made with Moses was broken, and annulled; because all the conditions of it had been violated: but "the better covenant" which was made with God in Christ, is "ordered in all things and sure[o];" and by it "the promise is made sure to all the seed[p]." That covenant is "confirmed by the oath of Jehovah, that by two immutable things, in which *it is impossible for God to lie, we* might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us[q]."

[f] Josh. vii. 9. Ps. lxxix. 9, 10. [g] Ezek. xxxix. 25.
[h] Ezek. xxxvi. 21—23.
[i] Jer. iii. 17. and xvii. 12. See this latter in particular.
[k] Ezek. vii. 21, 22. [l] Numb. xiv. 13—16. [m] ver. 7—9.
[n] Gal. iii. 16. [o] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. [p] Rom. iv. 16.
[q] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

This covenant God had engaged never to break[r]; and therefore the prophet urged the inviolability of it as a motive with God to fulfil to his people, notwithstanding their unworthiness, all which of his own grace and mercy he had promised to them. In this view God himself had promised to regard his covenant[s]: and in this view the plea in our text may be considered as expressing what is more diffusely stated by the Prophet Isaiah[t].]

Having stated what may be considered as the import of the prayer, we proceed,

II. To point out some important lessons contained in it—

We shall confine ourselves to two;

1. The true nature of a sinner's humiliation—

[Nothing can give us a more just idea of humiliation than the prophet's expression of it in our text. It necessarily implies an ingenuous confession of our sins, and of our desert on account of them. Think of the expression, "Abhor us not:" what a sense of extreme unworthiness does it convey! Yet is it not at all too strong: we are all, both by nature and practice, exceeding vile[u]; and ought, like Job, to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes[x]." Indeed *this* will be the state of every one that is truly penitent: he will look upon himself as "filthy and abominable[y]," and will "lothe himself for all his iniquities, and for all his abominations[z]." Every attempt to cloke or palliate our offences argues a want of humility, and operates to the exclusion of our souls from the Divine favour. We must be like convicted lepers in our own estimation, and justify our God in whatever sentence he may denounce against us[a].]

2. The proper grounds of a sinner's encouragement—

[Though we may justly acknowledge the work of Divine grace in us, and may give glory to God for whatever change he may have wrought in our hearts, yet we must not regard any thing of our own as a *ground* for our confidence in God: we must look for all our grounds of encouragement in God alone, even in his infinite perfections, and in the covenant which he has made with us in the Son of his love. When David was overwhelmed with trouble, we are told, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God." And this is what we are to do. In the prayer which the prophet offered, he drew all his pleasures from the honour and fidelity of his God. And what

[r] Ps. lxxxix. 35. [s] Lev. xxvi. 41, 42. [t] Isai. lxiii. 15—19.
[u] Job xl. 4. [x] Job xlii. 6. [y] Ps. xiv. 3.
[z] Ezek. xxxvi. 31. [a] Ps. li. 4.

encouragement can we want, if we only contemplate God as he is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures? As a mighty Sovereign, his grace is his own, and he may grant it to whomsoever he will; yea, and his sovereignty will be the more displayed and glorified, in the communication of grace to the very chief of sinners, and in making "his grace to abound, where sin has most abounded." The comfort to be derived from the contemplation of his love and mercy need not be stated; because that is obvious to the most inconsiderate mind. But even justice itself affords rich encouragement to a repenting sinner: for, has not an atonement been made for sin? and has not the Lord Jesus Christ discharged the debt of all those who trust in him? No doubt then, the justice of God, which has been satisfied by the ransom which his own Son has paid for us, will liberate us from our bondage, and restore us to all the privileges which his own Son has purchased for us. As he *can* be "a just God and yet a Saviour," so he *will* be just to his own Son, in shewing mercy to us for Christ's sake. Above all, his fidelity to his covenant-engagements leaves us no ground for fear; for never, since the foundation of the world, did one sinner perish who laid hold on his covenant, and rested in it as "all his salvation and all his desire."]

Let me in CONCLUSION be permitted to ask,

1. Have you ever pleaded with God in this manner—

[Alas! if God were now to order those who have pleaded thus with him to be sealed on their foreheads, and all the rest to be smitten dead upon the spot[b], what an awful spectacle would this place exhibit! Yet such a distinction will be made in the day of judgment. Beloved Brethren, consider this: and "judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord" ——— Shall it be said, that such pleadings are not necessary? What! were they judged necessary by the prophet for the averting of *temporal* judgments; and shall they not be for the averting of such as are *eternal?* Truly they are necessary for every child of man: nor can we hope to obtain mercy with God, unless we seek him thus with our whole hearts.]

2. Have you ever pleaded thus with God in vain—

[Never did God turn a deaf ear to one who sought him in this manner: "Never said he to any man, Seek ye my face in vain!" If any say that they have prayed, and yet not received an answer, we reply, that either they have never pleaded in this manner the perfections and the promises of God; or, an answer has been given, but has been overlooked. God cannot

[b] Ezek. ix. 1—6.

refuse an answer to a broken-hearted suppliant. He may answer in a way that we do not expect: or he may delay his answer with a view to our greater good: but as he has promised to grant such petitions as are offered up in faith, so will we affirm, in the presence of the whole universe, that "every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened[c]."]

[c] Matt. vii. 7, 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1054

THE WORD OF GOD PRECIOUS.

Jer. xv. 16. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*

THE commission given to the prophets was often of a very painful nature; to harden, rather than convert, their countrymen; and to denounce judgments, rather than to proclaim mercy[a]. Of this kind was the commission given to Jeremiah[b]: and for executing it, he was grievously persecuted and oppressed. Yet, notwithstanding the nature of his message, and the consequences resulting from a faithful delivery of it, he rejoiced in being honoured with an embassy from the King of kings; assured that, whatever might be the final result either to his countrymen or himself, God would be glorified. But when the prophets were sent only to denounce judgments, they knew that there was a secret reserve in the mind of God for the exercise of mercy, in case the people who were thus menaced should repent. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh to declare explicitly that in forty days the whole city should be overthrown, he had a secret suspicion, which in the event was verified, that God would, in case they repented, exercise mercy towards them. And in like manner, Jeremiah had a hope, that the faithful execution of his office, even though it should be unavailing to the generality, would be productive of good to some; and therefore on that account God's word, which he was sent to publish,

[a] Isai vi. 9—12. [b] ver. 1—4, 13, 14.

"was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. Under the Gospel dispensation, ministers are sent, not so much to thunder out anathemas against the rebellious world, as to proclaim to them "glad tidings of great joy." And the scope of the inspired writings, as now collected into one volume, is to encourage the desponding, and to give rest to the heavy-laden. Well therefore may all, whether ministers or people, when they take the sacred volume into their hands, say, "Thy word was found, and I did eat it; and it was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

In order to elucidate these words, we shall shew,

I. How the word of God should be received—

In the days of Josiah the word of God had been lost: and, when it was found, it was received with avidity, as a gift from heaven[c]. We do not however conceive that any similar event is referred to in the passage before us. The true light will be cast on our text, if we consult a parallel passage in the Prophet Ezekiel, where it was said to him, "Son of man, eat that *thou findest;* eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel:" and then he ate it, and it was in his "mouth as honey for sweetness[d]." In both the passages the word is compared to food, which is to be eaten and digested as the proper nutriment of the soul. This image is just; since, like common food, the word,

1. Is necessary for all—

[Who can live without it? Who can have any just knowledge of God without it, or have any conception how sinful man can obtain mercy at the hands of his offended God? The greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome were entirely in the dark on all subjects connected with the soul; nor could unenlighted reason ever have explored those mysteries which the inspired volume alone has revealed to man. Even at this present day, notwithstanding the light of revelation, the great and learned amongst ourselves are still ignorant of divine truth, if they have not been taught of God by the effectual application of his word to their souls. It is by the word that the knowledge of salvation is still communicated to every one

[c] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14—18. [d] Ezek. iii. 1—3.

of us: and we must all study it for ourselves, receiving its testimony with a believing heart, and submitting both our reason and our passions to its enlightening and sanctifying influence.]

2. It is suitable to all—

[In the sacred oracles there is "milk for babes, and strong meat" for those of an adult age[e]. The fundamental truths are written there so plainly, that "he who runs may read them:" and so clearly do they mark out the path to heaven, that "the way-faring man, though a fool, cannot err therein," if only he receive its directions with an humble and contrite spirit. On the other hand, there are in the inspired volume mysteries which no finite intelligence can fully comprehend. Not only may the greatest proficients in sacred literature be always advancing in knowledge, but the very angels themselves acquire more enlarged views of the manifold wisdom of God, from the revelation that is made of it in the Holy Scriptures[f]. Moreover, so infinitely diversified is the instruction to be gathered from the sacred volume, that we can be in no situation in which it does not contain the directions and encouragements most suited to our case.]

3. It is sufficient for all—

["The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus." We need no acquaintance with any other book, nor with any other subject which is not contained in that volume. Other books doubtless are useful, and a knowledge of many other subjects is desirable; but nothing is *necessary for salvation* which is not *contained in* the Holy Scriptures, and *easily to be learned from them.* A strange idea is maintained by some, that the Scriptures are unintelligible to the poor and illiterate; and that they are more likely to mislead them, than to guide them aright. But what a reflection is this on God himself, as having imparted to us a book altogether unsuited to the end for which it was given! But there is no ground for any such reflection. There are doubtless in the Scriptures *some* things hard to be understood, and which *an unstable person* may wrest to his own destruction: but we again affirm, that all which is necessary to be known is easily to be gathered from the word of God; and that, if it be "received with meekness as an engrafted word, it is able," and shall be effectual, "to save the soul[g]."]

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. What effect it will produce—

[e] Compare Heb. vi. 13, 14. with 1 Pet. ii. 2. and Col. iii. 16.
[f] 1 Pet. i. 12. with Eph. iii. 10. [g] Jam. i. 21.

As the roll, when eaten by Ezekiel, was as honey in his mouth, so to Jeremiah "the word was the joy and rejoicing of his heart." In a man that is impenitent and unbelieving, we acknowledge that the word is calculated to inspire terror: but to one that is of a penitent and contrite spirit, it speaks nothing but peace and joy. This is the proper effect of every part of the inspired volume; of,

1. Its declarations—

[O, how wonderful are these! What an exhibition does the Scripture give us of God's character, and of the way which he has provided for the salvation of sinful men! What a stupendous mystery does it reveal, of the incarnation and death of his co-equal, co-eternal Son! of Christ "bearing our sins in his body on the tree," and "being made sin for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him!" Can such tidings as these reach the ears of a guilty and condemned sinner, and not fill him with joy? Can the voice of pardon reach the cell of a condemned criminal, and be received with indifference? or, if the offers of a free and full salvation were now to be sent to the regions of the damned, would they excite no joyous emotions among the unhappy sufferers? If there be any, to whom the Gospel comes, that do not rejoice in the glad tidings, it is because they know not their lost estate, nor have any desire after reconciliation with their offended God. To those who know their guilty and undone state, the declarations of mercy sounding forth in the Gospel are "dearer than thousands of silver and gold."]

2. Its precepts—

[It may be thought, that, because these are so strict and holy, they can afford no joy to any: but the very reverse is the case; for the true believer will say with David, "Thy word is very pure; *therefore* thy servant *loveth* it[h]." A redeemed soul is asking, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" and in the precepts he sees what God requires of him, and how he may bring glory to the God of his salvation. He sees that an attention to these will perfect his nature, and transform him into the Divine image: hence "he esteems them concerning all things to be right[i];" and "*because they are right*, they rejoice his heart," and are accounted by him "sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb[k]."]

3. Its promises—

[h] Ps. cxix. 140. [i] Ps. cxix. 128. [k] Ps. xix. 8, 10.

[These are justly called by the Apostle "exceeding great and precious," more especially because "by them we are made partakers of a divine nature[l]," and are enabled to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[m]." Who can declare a thousandth part of the joy which a weary and heavy-laden sinner experiences in applying to his soul the promises of the Gospel? With what avidity does he devour them! They are like the first ripe fig which in the early spring a traveller sees, and devours, ere any one, however near to him, has time to claim it[n]: and the man who knows not this by his own sweet experience, has yet "to learn what be the very first principles of the oracles of God."]

4. Its threatenings—

[These to the believer are scarcely less precious than the promises themselves. It was one great excellence of the Scriptures in the estimation of David, that "by them he was *warned*[o]." He regarded them as a mariner his chart, by which he is warned of the rocks and quicksands on which he will infallibly be wrecked, if he deviate from his proper course. Is there a seaman, who, when in imminent danger, is instructed by that faithful monitor to avoid destruction, will not adore his God for the warning that taught him to escape it? So it is with all who truly fear God: they love to be warned: they desire to be put upon their guard: they are afraid of turning aside in any respect, or of relaxing their efforts in the path of duty. Like Paul, they contemplate the danger of a relapse as an incentive to fresh exertions, and "keep their body under, and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, they themselves should be cast-aways[p]." In a word, the believer views the threatenings, as the angels who took Lot and his daughters by the hand, and, by representations of their danger, accelerated their escape from the devouring element: he acquiesces in them as "just and holy;" and by their quickening influence he finds them to be "good."]

May we not then LEARN from hence,

1. What enemies to their own souls they are who neglect the Holy Scriptures!

[Notwithstanding the Scriptures are "the wells of salvation, from whence we are privileged to draw water with joy," the greater part even of the Christian world pay but little attention to them: any other book of science or amusement is preferred before them, and, unless in a formal cursory way, they are

[l] 2 Pet. i. 4. [m] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [n] Isai. xxviii. 4.
[o] Ps. xix. 11. [p] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

never read at all. Now what folly is this! What man in his senses, when navigating his ship amongst rocks and quicksands, neglects to consult his chart? Yet, as if there were no dangers in the Christian's way, or no great evil to be incurred by negligence, the generality are quite indifferent about that book which alone can conduct us safely to a better world. But let it not be so amongst you: "Search the Scriptures, in which ye think, yea and know assuredly, ye have eternal life." "Search them daily," as the Bereans did: "search them as for hid treasure:" and lift up your hearts to God for the teachings of his good Spirit, "to guide you into all truth." "He will open your understandings to understand them," and will work effectually by them to your salvation. They are the rod of God's strength, and the sword of his Spirit: and if you read them in humility and faith, you shall find them "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and they shall discover to you the very thoughts and intents of your hearts[q]." If you will not sit thus at the feet of Jesus and learn of him, it is in vain for you to number yourselves among his disciples: but if you will come to him, you need not be discouraged at your weakness or ignorance; for he says, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."]

2. What an unspeakable blessing is *the Bible Society!*

[Though the Scriptures are not with us, as among the Papists, locked up in a language not generally understood, yet by the cost of a Bible it has been to a great extent kept out of the possession of the poor. True it is, that they who have known the value of the Bible would procure it at any rate: but those who were unacquainted with its treasures have found it too costly for them to purchase. But now he that is able to pay only a part, may have it for that part; and they who can really pay nothing, may have it for nothing. Now therefore the poor may well say, "Thy word *is found:* yes, it *is found;* and I will eat it." O that there were in all of us such a heart! and that we were all determined henceforth to feed upon its precious truths; and that, like Job, we "esteemed it more than our necessary food[r]!" Now God is sending it to all of us, the poorest as well as the richest, exactly as he did the manna in the wilderness: he sends it home to our very houses, and invites us to live upon it. The king upon the throne has no richer food; and the poorest amongst us has now a free access to it, so that he may "eat that which is good, and let

[q] Heb. iv. 12. [r] Job xxiii. 12.

his soul delight itself in fatness[s]." Let us bless God then, who has put it into the hearts of so many to provide for us such ample supplies of this invaluable treasure: and let us all, according to our ability, labour to promote the designs of a Society, which is the most honourable to God, and most useful to man, that ever existed upon the face of the earth.]

[s] Isai. lv. 2.

OUTLINE NO. 1055

THE DUTY OF TRUSTING IN GOD.

Jer. xvii. 5—8. *Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river; and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green: and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.*

EVERY created being derives its existence and support from God: yet man is prone to depend on the creature rather than on him. Though constantly disappointed, he still leans on an arm of flesh; but such conduct is justly reprobated in the strongest terms.

We shall consider,

I. The characters that are contrasted—

Every man by nature "trusts in man, makes flesh his arm, and his heart departs from the Lord." We need not go to heathens or infidels to find persons of this description. We need only search the records of our own conscience.

[*In temporal things*, we never think of looking above the creature: if they be prosperous, we trust in uncertain riches, and take the glory to ourselves; if adverse, we lean to our own understanding and exertions, or rely for succour on our friends. *In spiritual things*, we seek to establish a righteousness of our own; we expect to repent and serve God by our own strength.]

The true Christian "trusts in the Lord, and makes the Lord his hope"—

[He trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as *the God of providence*: he commits his affairs to him, expecting his promised aid. He trusts also in Jesus as *the God of grace*: he renounces all hope in his own goodness or resolutions: he cordially adopts the language of the Church of old[a]—]

These marks afford a sure line of distinction between the nominal and the real Christian—

[Both may be moral, charitable, and attentive to religious duties; but the regenerate alone trust simply in the Lord. Not that all the regenerate are alike delivered from self-dependence; nor do the same persons always exercise their graces in the same degree. There are remains of self-righteousness, &c. in the best of men; but the unregenerate allow these things which are abhorred by the regenerate.]

Nor is this difference between them of trifling import.

II. Their respective conditions—

Men's eternal state will be fixed with perfect equity. The conditions of the characters before us are strongly contrasted:

1. Simply; "blessed," &c. "cursed," &c.

[What can be more *important* than these declarations? They are not the dictates of enthusiasm, but the voice of God; "Thus saith the Lord." And may we not adopt Balak's words in reference to God[b]?— And what can be more *reasonable?* God has given his Son to be our Saviour; but while some confide in him, others, by not trusting in him, reject him: how reasonable then is it that a curse should attach to these, and a blessing to those! Such a difference in their conditions seems the *necessary* result of their own conduct. Spiritual life or death are dependent on our trust in the Lord, just as the life of the body is on our receiving or rejecting of animal food. Let every one then inquire, which of these conditions he has reason to expect?]

2. Figuratively—

To mark the contrast more clearly, it is further observed, that both the blessing and the curse shall be

Abundant—

[The unbeliever "shall be like the heath in the desert;" he shall be left in a state of extreme barrenness and wretched-

[a] Isai. xlv. 24. [b] Numb. xxii. 6.

ness: and this too amidst all his boasted fulness[c]. The believer "shall be as a tree planted by the waters," &c.; he shall be made flourishing and happy by rich supplies of grace[d].]

Unmixed—

[The unbeliever "shall not see when good cometh:" he receives none of the heavenly dew that falls around him. The believer "shall not see when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green, nor shall he be careful in the year of drought:" he may experience "heat" and "drought," *i.e.* heavy afflictions; he shall, however, not be injured, but benefited by them[e]: free from all anxiety, he will say as the Church of old[f]—]

Eternal—

[The unbeliever "shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited:" he shall be an outcast from God in the regions of misery. The believer "shall not cease from yielding fruit:" his present enjoyments are the pledge and earnest of eternal happiness.]

INFER—

1. How glorious a person must Christ be!

[If he were a mere creature, it would be ruinous in the extreme to trust in him; but we are expressly commanded to trust in him[g]. He must then be "God over all, blessed for ever." And this renders him worthy of our fullest affiance: on him must "hang all the glory of his Father's house[h]."]

2. How are we all concerned to trust in Christ!

[God regards, not merely our outward conduct, but the frame of our hearts: on this our present and everlasting happiness depends[i]. Let us then trust in him for all temporal and spiritual aid; so shall we receive his blessing, and escape his curse.]

[c] Job xx. 22. [d] Phil. iv. 19.

[e] His afflictions lose not their nature, but effect: tribulation, which fills others with vexation, works patience in him; the furnace, which consumes others, purges away his dross. Heb. xii 11.

[f] Hos. vi. 1. [g] John xiv. 1. [h] Isai. xxii. 23, 24.

[i] Conceive Christ as making this declaration in the day of judgment. Compare Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

OUTLINE NO. 1056

NECESSITY OF KNOWING OURSELVES.

Jer. xvii. 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

A MORE important subject than that before us cannot occupy the human mind. The knowledge of ourselves is fundamental to all true knowledge of religion. Religion is no longer to us what it was to man in his primeval state, the natural expression of all the feelings of his soul: it is a remedy, devised for the restoration of his soul to the favour, and to the image, of his God: and we must see in what manner, and to what extent, we are fallen, before we can understand aright the provision made for our recovery: we must know our disorder before we can appreciate the remedy. Behold then what the Scripture speaks concerning us! The expressions in our text are not an eastern metaphor, that must be softened down; or a complaint uttered against one particular individual, whose impieties far exceeded the common standard of mankind: they are a plain exposition of the state to which the heart of man is reduced by the fall of Adam: and, however we may wish, for the credit of human nature, to put a lenient construction on the terms, we cannot by any fair means explain them away: they are absolutely inflexible; and we must bow before them, as containing the infallible testimony of God concerning us. But it is not without a considerable measure of fear and diffidence that we enter upon the investigation of a subject so deep, so vast, so occult. When God himself says, "Who can know it?" we seem presumptuous in undertaking to explain it. But we hope that the acknowledged necessity of every man's attaining some knowledge of it will plead our excuse for any attempt which we may make to throw light upon it; and that you will supply our defects by lifting up your hearts to God in prayer, and entreating *him* to give you that self-knowledge, which, even a heathen saw, must descend from heaven.

The subjects then for our present consideration are, the deceitfulness, and wickedness, of the human heart:

I. Its deceitfulness—

There is perhaps no stronger proof of the deceitful-

ness of the heart than the power it possesses to hide its deceits from us. But, that we may present somewhat of its deceitfulness to your view, we will distinctly mark it in the three following particulars:

It misrepresents the *nature* of all things;

It keeps out of view their *tendency*; And

It deceives, not others only, but itself also.

Of course, when we say, "It misrepresents the nature of all things," we must be understood as speaking only of the things which concern the soul. To advert to other things, and to consider how far the powers of the human mind are enfeebled in relation to matters of mere science, would be altogether beside our purpose.

But where shall we begin our illustration of this point? If we look up to *God*, there is not a perfection of his nature which the unenlightened mind views aright; and as for those perfections which he exercises as the moral Governor of the universe, they are even held in abhorrence by the carnal mind: his absolute sovereignty is denied, as though the exercise of it were an injustice to man: his holiness and justice are supposed capable of winking at the commission of sin; and his veracity is impeached, to make way for the salvation of those who rebel against him. Some are so foolish and infatuated, as to "say, There is no God:" and, of those who acknowledge his existence, there is not one, unless he have been previously converted by Divine grace, who entertains worthy conceptions of him in his heart.

If we turn our thoughts to *the world around us;* what is there, that the heart of man views in its proper light? Its pleasures? its riches? its honours? All these, instead of being regarded as snares and worthless vanities, are perfectly idolized, and are sought after as constituting the chief happiness of man.

Look we to *morals?* How erroneous are our conceptions even of the plainest duties! Pride, anger,

revenge, are held forth as noble and honourable; whilst the virtues of humility, meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are despised, as indications of a weak and cowardly disposition. As formerly neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word in their language whereby to express the true notion of humility, so now the very idea of humility, as enjoined in the Christian code, never enters into the mind of an unconverted man, unless it be to load it with ridicule and contempt.

Go we, further, to *religion?* That is considered as consisting in little more than a profession of certain tenets, and an observance of certain forms. The entire devotion of the soul to God is deemed a foolish and culpable excess, the effect of needless timidity or of enthusiastic ardour: and, to countenance these ideas, harsh and offensive names are used to characterize all true piety; whilst every thing contrary to the Divine commands, is palliated with soft names and plausible excuses.

In a word, the Scripture itself describes the heart of man in this precise view, as "calling evil good, and good evil; as putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; as putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter[a]."

Proceed we then, next, to observe, that the heart keeps out of view the *tendency* of things. Let us instance this in relation to sin. Who, on his first entrance on a sinful course, imagines whither his vicious propensities will lead him? He thinks of a present gratification, but does not consider that sin is "like the letting out of water;" and that the smallest breach in a bank opens the way for the most extensive inundation. If a thought of our final account occur to the mind, the heart suggests, that the sin may be repented of with ease, and that there is no just reason to be afraid of its consequences; notwithstanding its uniform tendency is, to harden the heart, to sear the conscience, to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God, and to rivet upon our souls the

[a] Isai. v. 20.

chains which have been forged by the great destroyer of mankind. Ask any man who feels the burthen and the bitterness of sin, whether, when committing it, he had any idea of its tendency to distress the soul, and to create, as it were, a very hell within him? He will tell you, that, in following his lusts, he dreamed of nothing but pleasure; and that whilst he was tempted with the bait, the hook was only faintly suspected, or kept entirely out of view. Whatever be the sin to which we are tempted, the heart suggests, that there is no great evil in it; that God is too merciful to punish us eternally for such a trifle; that it is not possible for *us* to perish, since all around us are in the same state with ourselves; or that, at all events, a dying hour will be quite time enough for the indulging of any melancholy reflections; and that a few prayers, then offered, will answer every end that we can wish. Thus the delusions of sin, and the wiles of Satan, are all countenanced by our own evil hearts; and the awful consequences of transgression are kept out of sight, till it is too late to avert them. Against this propensity of the heart we are warned in the Holy Scriptures: If, says God, a man hearing the curses denounced against him in my word, "bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, then I will not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven[b]."

The third mark which we mentioned as shewing the unparalleled deceitfulness of the heart, is this, that it deceives, not others only, but itself also. It is said in our text to be "deceitful above all things." Riches and other things are said to be deceitful; but they are so called, only because the heart makes them occasions of deceiving us: they are themselves altogether passive in the matter. Of active agents, Satan is beyond all comparison the greatest deceiver,

[b] Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

except the heart: but he, when he is deceiving, is conscious that he is deceiving: he does not for a moment imagine that he is speaking truth: but the heart persuades itself that it is not guilty of any imposition: it is as confident of its own integrity, as if it were really upright; and as fully convinced of the truth of its representations, as if they were really true. This is the case universally amongst those who are yet in a carnal and unconverted state. Those who imagine that religion consists in the observance of certain forms, are often as free from doubts as any people upon earth; and if it be insinuated that they are blind, they ask with surprise and indignation, "Are we blind also?" In like manner a ferocious bloody-thirsty persecutor will actually think, that, whilst he is killing the Lord's people, "he is doing God service:" just as the persecuting Saul "verily thought with himself that he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus." But further, even the Atheist, who reduces God to a level with man, persuades himself that he is right; "Thou *thoughtest* that I was altogether such an one as thyself[c]." Indeed the same propensity of heart shews itself even after that we are converted: the Apostles themselves, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village, thought, undoubtedly, that their proposal was at least an acceptable expression of their zeal: but our Lord told them, that "they knew not what spirit they were of:" and Peter, when dissuading his Master from entertaining any thoughts about sufferings and death, supposed that he displayed most unexceptionably the tenderness of his love; whilst in reality he was, as our Lord himself told him, no other than an agent of the devil.

Of this power of the heart to deceive *itself*, all men are conscious, *in relation to others;* but all overlook it *in relation to themselves.* Nothing is easier than for a spectator to form a tolerably correct judgment of the motives and principles of others, and to see

[c] Ps. l. 21.

the obliquity of them, whilst the actors themselves imagine themselves actuated by the purest feelings. Justly therefore is it said by Him who cannot err, that "the heart is deceitful *above all things*," not excepting even Satan himself, the great deceiver of mankind.

We are now to consider,

II. The wickedness of the heart—

But how shall we state it, so as in any measure to correspond with the description in our text? We are almost afraid that we shall be regarded as libelling human nature: yet we must declare the truth, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." Know then, that the heart by nature is *universally* wicked, *unsearchably* wicked, and *incurably* wicked.

It is *universally* wicked, both in all its powers, and in every exercise of each. We do not say, that there may not be a considerable portion of *comparative* good in men, so that they may be more amiable, and more worthy members of society than others; (for doubtless there is by nature a great difference in men, as well in their moral dispositions as in their intellectual powers;) but there is nothing *positively* good in them, in the strict acceptation of the word: for in the Book of Job it is said, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean[d]?" And our Lord says, "There is none good but one; that is, God." The understanding of man is darkened by sin; the will is rendered perverse and obstinate; the affections are sensualized: the conscience is made partial and insensible; and the whole man is altogether become abominable; his heart being the seat of every lust, the womb from whence every sin proceeds[e]. It must be remembered, moreover, that man sins by defect, as well as by a direct and wilful opposition to his duty; so that even if we should suppose human nature to be possessed of all the excellencies which

[d] Job xiv. 4. and xxv. 4. [e] Mark vii. 21—23

its most sanguine advocates can imagine, still we must all adopt for ourselves the confession of St. Paul, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." We are aware that this may appear to go beyond the truth: but, if any be disposed to entertain such an opinion, we would ask, What is the meaning of that declaration, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually[f]?" This testimony, though spoken of men before the flood, was renewed in reference to men after the flood: and what can be conceived more decisive of the point than this? Not only the *thoughts* of men, but the *imaginations* of their thoughts, yea, and *every* imagination of their thoughts, was *evil*, and *only* evil, and only evil *continually*. This was the testimony of Him "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins:" we may be well assured, therefore, that this record is true.

Again—The heart is also *unsearchably* wicked. Not only are we unable to discover all the evil that is in the hearts of others; we cannot even in our own. Suppose a man to have discovered ever so much of his own depravity, there will yet be depths within him unfathomable and unexplored. As Ezekiel, in the chambers of imagery, saw on every successive search more and greater abominations than before, so will a man to his dying hour find in his heart many and great evils which he had not so clearly seen before. Times and occasions will call them forth; so that a man will often wonder how such evils could remain within him, or, if within him, how they should have continued so long undiscovered. The truth is, a man could not bear a full sight of his own heart at once; it would drive him to utter despair: nor is any man capable of seeing it all at once: its deceits are so subtle, its corruptions so various, and its abominations so inconceivably great, that none but an infinite capacity can grasp such immeasurable heights and depths. Well therefore

[f] Gen. vi. 5. and viii. 21.

has God said, "Who, except the heart-searching God, can know it?"

But once more;—It is *incurably* evil. Whether or not, as some have thought, this is the precise import of the word, it is plain that the idea is strongly conveyed in our translation, as it stands. Verily our case, as to any human remedies at least, is desperate. We call not any case desperate in relation to the Gospel; because there is no sin from which the blood of Christ cannot cleanse us, nor any corruption, which the Spirit of Christ is not able to subdue. But to human means the wickedness of our hearts bids defiance: they can no more overcome it, than Elisha's staff in Gehazi's hand could raise the Shunamite's child to life. No resolutions of ours, no exertions, can banish it from the soul. We may on many occasions restrain its actings; for even the presence of a fellow-creature will often impose a more effectual restraint than the presence of our God: but we cannot subdue it, we cannot mortify it, we cannot purge it away: it is like the leprosy in the house, that could not be in any way removed, but by pulling down the house altogether. This, it must be confessed, is a melancholy picture: but it is the very truth of God, and is known, and felt, to be so, by all who are taught of God.

Now from this view of our subject we may clearly SEE—

1. *The true ground of the doctrine of the new birth*—

It is surprising how often the Scripture speaks respecting the being "born again," the being "begotten of God," and "born of God:" which terms must of necessity import, not merely an outward change of state or profession in baptism, but an inward change of heart, a passing "from darkness to light," "from death to life." It is to be "born, not of water only, but of the Spirit also." When that takes place, we die to sin, and begin to live unto righteousness: we become "new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things pass away; and all things become

new[g]." Baptism is the sign and seal of it, but not the thing itself. What the circumcision of the *heart* was, as compared with the circumcision of the *flesh*, that the new birth is, as compared with baptism: it is the real radical change, of which the external rite was a type or shadow[h]. Now this change is absolutely and indispensably necessary to the salvation of the soul: "Verily, verily I say unto you," says our Lord, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But why so? why must every child of man undergo such a change as this? For this plain reason; He is so radically corrupt in every faculty and power of his soul by nature, as to be absolutely incapable of enjoying heaven, even if he were there: having no love to a holy God, nor any delight in holy employments *here*, he would be destitute of them *there;* being filthy *here*, he would be "filthy *still*." This, we apprehend, is the exact meaning of those words of our Lord, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." Nicodemus not understanding the nature, or the reasons, of the doctrine which our Lord had insisted on, our Lord told him, that the new birth was founded on our unfitness by nature for the kingdom of heaven; since that which was born of the flesh, being only fleshly, was altogether incapable of spiritual enjoyments; whereas that which was born of the Spirit being spiritual, it was necessary to fit us for the exercises and employments of a spiritual kingdom. Let us not then deceive ourselves with vain disputations about *words*, but let us attend to *things* which admit of no doubt. Our hearts are by nature "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and they must be changed by the operation of the Spirit of God: we must have "the heart of

[g] 2 Cor. v. 17.

[h] The benefits arising from baptism are great, even as those were which arose from circumcision. See Rom. ix. 4, 5. But we must not confound a change of *state* with a change of *nature*. The neglecting to make this distinction is the foundation of all the errors which have arisen on this subject. See Rom. ii. 28, 29.

stone taken away, and a heart of flesh given to us:" we must be "renewed after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness;" and therefore we should not rest one hour in a carnal and unconverted state; but should cry mightily to our God for his effectual grace, saying with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" The Lord grant that this prayer may ascend up before him from every one of us, till we have obtained an answer to it in the renovation of our souls!

In the next place, We may SEE from hence,

Our utter need of an interest in Christ—

With such hearts as ours, how can we ever dream of *meriting* any thing at the hands of God? To shew the vanity of any such idea, let us not rest in a general notion of man's goodness, but descend to particulars, and try to find some one action that can stand the test of God's word, some one in which God himself shall not be able to find a flaw. Let a man search through the whole records of his life for one such action; and if he find *one,* we will be content that he shall stand upon *that* as the foundation of his hopes, and claim heaven on the ground of his own merits. But if not one such action can be found by the best person upon earth, how much less can a whole series of such actions, from the beginning to the end of life, be found! yet nothing less than that could warrant a claim to heaven on the ground of our own obedience: one single transgression, however small, is a violation of the law; and not only makes void all its promises of life, but renders us obnoxious to its curses, even to everlasting misery and death[i]. Let us then discard so vain, so fatal a delusion: let us be contented to stand on the same foundation as St. Paul: let us "desire to win Christ, and to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." We *call* the Lord

[i] Gal. iii. 10.

Jesus Christ, "Saviour:" let us rely upon him as our Saviour: let us trust in his blood and righteousness as the only meritorious ground of our hope: and let us glory in him, as "all our salvation, and all our desire."

Lastly, Let us SEE from hence,

The importance of self-diffidence and self-distrust—

There is an astonishing degree of confidence in men of every class and every description. The ungodly man, who gratifies all his inclinations, and lives altogether without God in the world, has no fear that he shall perish: 'his sins are no other than venial frailties, and God neither notices nor regards them.' The man who is a mere formalist, whose religion consists in a "form of godliness without the power of it," is equally persuaded, that no harm shall ever happen to him: he performs his duty, and has no doubt of his final acceptance with God. The man whose heart is divided between God and the world, and who will follow religion only so far as agrees with his interests and humour, is quite certain that God is pleased with him, and will accept at his hand his reluctant and mutilated offerings. The zealous talkative religionist, who disgraces his profession by his conceit, his censoriousness, his neglect of his own proper duties and calling, by his disorderly conduct both in Church and State, yea, by all manner of evil tempers and sinful practices, even he also has no doubt but that his name is written in heaven. And, if we attempt to expostulate with any of these on their unscriptural presumption, they are quite offended at the liberty we take, and are surprised that we dare to question the certainty of their salvation[k]. Thus does Satan blind them all, and "lead them captive at his will." But let me entreat all to relax somewhat of their confidence, and to bring their expectations to

[k] To this effect is that humiliating observation of Solomon, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits." And again, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Prov. xvi. 2, 25.

the test of Scripture. It is certain that many do believe a lie; and are given over to it by God, as the punishment of their presumption. What the Apostle says respecting this, is so awful, that I almost tremble to repeat his words: yet as they are the words of God himself, I trust you will hear them, not only without offence, but with the reverence that is due to God: "For this cause," (that is, "because men receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved,") "God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness[l]." What a fearful judgment is this! and how should we dread the provoking of God to inflict it upon us! If then we would not be given up to judicial blindness, "let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord our God." Let us be satisfied with nothing but the clear express testimony of Scripture: for God has said, "He that trusteth his own heart, is a fool[m]." If we find that we have really been born again of the Spirit, and been washed from our sins in the Redeemer's blood; if there be no sin which we knowingly indulge, nor any command of God which we do not endeavour to fulfil; if we can call God to witness, that the continued labour of our lives is to "walk as Christ walked;" then God forbid that I should attempt to destroy the confidence of such persons: they have a right to be confident; and instead of distressing their minds with needless fears, I would exhort them to "hold fast their confidence, and the rejoicing of their hope firm unto the end." But nevertheless I would entreat them to deal faithfully with their own souls; and not only to search them with all diligence themselves, but to cry mightily unto God in the words of David; "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting!" Yea more, to their dying hour I would urge them to be diffident of themselves, even when they are most confident in

[l] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. [m] Prov. xxviii. 26.

God. For even St. Paul felt this to be necessary: "Though I know nothing by myself," says he, "yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." There may be self-deceit in us, even when we are least aware of it: and therefore with all our might we should guard against it, lest we find out our delusions, when it is too late to apply a remedy. Of one thing we are sure, that God will not fix our state according to our fancied attainments, but according to our real character in his sight. We say therefore to all, and with those words we shall close our discourse, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

OUTLINE NO. 1057

GOD'S RULE OF JUDGMENT.

Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

THE evil of the human heart is far greater than can be fully conceived either by men or angels. None but God himself can explore the depths of iniquity that are within it[a]. But He will judge the world in righteousness at the last day; and consequently must have access to the inmost recesses of the soul, and must be able to bring forth to judgment all its hidden abominations. Accordingly, God himself informs us, that he is actually so occupied, noticing every thing, and recording every thing, in order that he may reward every man according to his deeds: "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

We may here see,

[a] ver. 9.

I. The preparation which God is making for the future judgment—

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good[b]." Nor is he an unconcerned spectator of what is done upon earth: on the contrary, he inspects every thing with the greatest accuracy; and *therefore* inspects it, that he may bring it forth to judgment, and pass sentence upon it.

1. He continually marks the ways of men—

[All *their actions* he observes, not merely according to their outward aspect, but according to the principles from whence they proceed, and the ends for which they are done. However good a thing may be in itself, it is not really good in God's sight, unless it proceed from love to him, and be done with a view to his glory. Our most common actions *ought* to be *so* done: "whether we eat, or drink, or *whatever we do*, we should do all to the glory of God[c]." Our *words* also, and our very *thoughts*, are scrutinized by him, to ascertain how much there is of good or evil in them; and to record the same, as grounds of our condemnation or acquittal at the bar of judgment. Hence it is said by David, "His eyes behold, and his eyelids try, the children of men[d];" that is, as a man desiring to inspect a thing with more than usual accuracy, almost closes his eyes, in order to exclude every other object, and to fix his attention more intensely on the object before him; so does God examine with the utmost possible care the ways of every human being. This is declared yet more strongly by Solomon, who says, that God "weigheth the spirits[e]." Now, in the spirits of men there is a great mixture of motives and principles, which need to be analyzed and distinguished. There is, even in good men, a mixture of faith and of unbelief, of love to God and self-love, of sincerity and hypocrisy. Hezekiah evinced this, in his treatment of the Babylonish Ambassadors[f]; as did James and John also, when, from zeal for their Master's honour, they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village[g]. In fact, there is imperfection in every thing that proceeds from man. Our very humiliations have a mixture of pride, and our exultations, of self-complacency. But "God tries the reins," as a philosopher assays gold; and will assuredly declare, at the last day, how much there was of alloy in the very best action of our lives, and how much of the purer metal. Moreover,]

[b] Prov. xv. 3. [c] 1 Cor. x. 31. [d] Ps. xi. 4.
[e] Prov. xvi. 2. [f] 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. [g] Luke ix. 54.

2. He records every thing in the book of his remembrance—

[The thoughts as well as the words of men are recorded in this book[h]; and out of these books shall they be judged[i]. Indeed, they are all "sealed up, as it were, in a bag," in order to be then brought forth as grounds of God's decision, and as evidences of his equity[k]. Nothing will escape his observation. If there be only "some good thing in any person," he will discern it, and bring it forth to light, with such tokens of his approbation as the occasion may require[l]. The sigh, the groan, the tear, are put to the account of those who love him; whilst every advantage that has been abused, and every opportunity that has been lost, will be adduced as swelling the aggregate of his enemies' guilt.]

But this brings me more particularly to notice,

II. The rule by which that judgment shall be determined—

The sentence which will be passed on every man will be in accordance with his works.

This, however, needs to be explained—

[We are not to suppose that our good works are put in one scale, and our evil works in another; and that, according to the scale which preponderates, our fate shall be. Nor are we to imagine that, when we have done a certain number of good works, the merits of Christ shall be cast, as it were, into the scale, in order to procure acceptance for them. The way of salvation is widely different from either of these. We all, without exception, are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation. But he has given his only-begotten Son to die for us; and will accept to mercy all who come to him in his Son's name. Those who have believed in Christ will in that day be approved as having embraced the proffered salvation: and those who have rejected the Saviour, will be rejected of their God. But still there will be a great difference as to the measure of misery or of happiness which these different parties will inherit. Amongst the righteous, "one star will differ from another star in glory;" and amongst the wicked, some will be "beaten with many stripes, and others with few," according as circumstances have occurred to extenuate or aggravate their guilt.]

Rightly understood, *this* strongly declares the equity of God's future judgments—

[h] Mal. iii. 16.
[i] Rev. xx. 12, 13.
[k] Job xiv. 17.
[l] 1 Kings xiv. 13.

[If salvation had been, not by faith, but by works; not a gift of grace, but a debt discharged; it would have been accorded to men precisely on terms corresponding with the rule which is here established. We are told, that "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap: he that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[m]. We are further assured, that, "if we have sowed sparingly, we shall reap sparingly; and if we have sowed bountifully, we shall reap also bountifully[n]." Due respect, indeed, will be paid to men's abilities and opportunities; the widow's mite being as acceptable as the largest gifts of the opulent; and "a cup of cold water, given" from a right principle, as valuable as the richest hospitality. In a word, every thing that can affect the quality of an action will be taken into the account, either for the increase of our punishment or the augmentation of our bliss.]

BEHOLD, then,

1. What an awful prospect is here opened to the ungodly!

[There is not a day or an hour in which an ungodly man is not providing misery for himself, and "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." Now, if we congratulate a person that is amassing wealth, how should we pity a man that is amassing misery for himself, even though that misery were but for a few years! But when we see men "drawing out iniquity" to an indefinite extent, by adding fresh materials to it, as they do to a cord or cable[o], methinks we should weep over them. To such an one, even the word preached to him for his salvation "becomes to him a savour of death unto death[p]." Do but reflect on this, my beloved brethren; and beg of God that you may henceforth improve every hour of your lives for the furtherance of that great work which God has given you to accomplish; that so, whenever you are called hence, you may "give up to him your account with joy, and not with grief."]

2. What encouragement is here afforded to the righteous!

[Not a day or an hour passes without adding to your happiness in the eternal world. The least thing which you do for God shall be rewarded; and every trial that you sustain for him, be recompensed. Moses "looked to the recompence of the reward;" and the same may you do also. How would this thought lighten all your crosses, if it were duly contemplated

[m] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[n] 2 Cor. ix. 6.
[o] This is the proper meaning of Isai. v. 18.
[p] 2 Cor. ii. 16.

and firmly believed! Does St. Paul say, "Our light affliction, which endureth but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[q]?" Whom will you fear? or rather, What sufferings will you not welcome for Christ's sake? Go on then, my brethren, labouring to "keep a conscience void of offence" towards both God and man: and let it be your care so to approve yourselves to the heart-searching God, that, when he shall judge the world, he may say to you, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, be thou ruler over many things." "Enter now into the joy of thy Lord, thou good and faithful servant;" and "inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world."]

[q] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1058

THE POTTER'S POWER OVER THE CLAY.

Jer. xviii.6. *O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel.*

WHILE the grandeur of the heavenly bodies fills us with a sense of our own insignificance[a], we may learn many instructive lessons from the meanest creatures upon earth. The instinctive wisdom of the crane or swallow, the provident care of the ant, and the grateful acknowledgments of the ox and ass, are proposed to us as models for our imitation[b]. Nor are works of art less capable of suggesting useful hints to a reflecting mind. In the passage before us the prophet was commanded to observe a potter forming his vessels, and to declare to the Jews that they were, notwithstanding all their boasted strength, as much subject to the will of God as the clay was to the potter's will. To illustrate this we shall shew,

I. The power of God over us—

We can scarcely conceive any greater power than the potter has over the clay. He forms, or mars, or varies the shape of his vessels, as he pleases. Such is God's power over us,

1. Individually considered—

[a] Ps. viii. 3, 4. [b] Jer. viii. 7. Prov. vi. 6—8. Isai. i. 3.

[Every man is altogether in the hands of God. Our *bodies* are instantly brought low, when he sends a fierce disease to prey upon them. Nor can the physician's aid profit us, till he be pleased to bless the means prescribed[c] Our *souls* are also entirely dependent upon him. When his time is come, the obdurate relent, the dead arise, the drooping are comforted, and the weak established. Till then, the Bible is a sealed book, and the most faithful ministers are only as sounding brass[d].]

2. In our collective capacity—

[The most flourishing *families*, how soon are they brought low! And how speedily may they be restored to their former prosperity[e]! Nor are the most powerful *kingdoms* less at his disposal. He can raise a mighty empire from the most contemptible beginnings[f], or reduce it to utter ruin in a single hour[g]. As the smallest motion of the finger suffices to effect any change upon the potter's clay, so the secret volition of the Almighty operates with irresistible energy through the whole creation.]

This truth being universally admitted, we shall proceed to shew,

II. What effect the consideration of it should produce upon us—

Every perfection of the Deity should occasion some correspondent emotion in our hearts. The thought of his unbounded power over us should produce in us,

1. A holy fear—

[What our deserts are, both individually and collectively, none can doubt. To repent then of all our sins, and to turn to the Lord with all our hearts, is our first duty. This is the special point inculcated on the Jewish nation by God himself[h]. And where is the individual who does not feel the necessity of having it impressed on his own mind? Know then, all of you, that you are at this instant preparing either for heaven or for hell. If in your final condition you are "vessels unto dishonour," the fault will be your own. If happily you prove vessels of honour, it will be solely in consequence of God's

[c] Job xxxiii. 19—25. [d] Ps. cvii. 12—20.
[e] Job i. 18,19. and xlii. 12, 13. [f] Isai. li. 1, 2. Deut. vii. 7.
[g] 2 Kings xix. 35. Exod. xiv. 28. If this be the subject of a *Fast* Sermon, the circumstances of the nation may properly be adverted to in this place, and the duties inculcated under the second head must have a *national*, as well as personal bearing.
[h] Read ver. 7—10. and mark emphatically ver. 11.

electing love[i], and his new-creating power[k]. Cry then mightily to God to "accomplish for you and in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."]

2. A meek submission—

[God best knows how to effect in you the purposes of his grace. For the most part he makes use of afflictive dispensations for our good; and, of whatever kind they be, we can have no just reason to complain. If the clay has no right to complain of the potter who forms of it a vessel such as he himself pleases, much less can "a *living* man," who is out of hell, have right, under any circumstances, to "complain" of God[l]. Under every trial, of whatever kind it be, we should say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."]

3. A humble trust—

[If only we lie as clay in his hands, we have nothing to fear[m]. Both men and devils are with him but as an axe or saw, with which he accomplishes his own purposes[n]. We have only to commit ourselves to him, and we shall have his work perfected in our hearts, and be made vessels of honour meet for the Master's use[o]. How weak soever, or worthless we be, God will glorify himself in our complete salvation[p].]

[i] Acts ix. 15.
[k] Rom. ix. 21—23. Distinguish between *κατηρτισμένα* by themselves, and God's agency in ἃ *προητοίμασεν*.
[l] Isai. xlv. 9. with Rom. ix. 19, 20. [m] Isai. li. 12, 13.
[n] Isai. x. 15. [o] 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21. [p] Isai. xl. 27—31.

OUTLINE NO. 1059

A SOUL UNDER DISCOURAGEMENT.

Jer. xx. 9. *Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*

IF we would see the corruption of human nature in its true light, we should look at it, not merely as existing in the worst of men, but as breaking forth even in the best. A more tender-hearted and pious man than Jeremiah did not perhaps exist on earth at his day: yet, under great provocation, he breaks forth into language most unseemly, both against God and man. As to the reproachful name by which he

designated his persecuting enemy, we may well suppose, that, as it was justly merited on the part of Pashur, so it was denounced only in compliance with a divine impulse: "The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib;" which imported, that "he should be a terror to himself, and to all his friends[a]." But we cannot offer any such apology for the language which he afterwards uttered, in reproaching God himself, and execrating even the day of his birth[b]. We behold here the struggle between grace and corruption, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh:" and when we see how awfully an unhallowed temper prevailed over this good man, we cannot but exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou so regardest him?"

In the conflict that is here expressed, we behold,

I. The effects of discouragement on a pious soul—

Doubtless there was abundant occasion for the prophet to complain. Pashur, the chief governor in the house of the Lord during the course allotted to him in the temple, had certainly treated him with great cruelty and great indignity, "putting him into the stocks," as a public spectacle to all. Upon this, the spirit of the prophet was roused; and he complained even against God himself, in whose service he had been subjected to this heavy trial. "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;" or, as it is translated in the margin, "Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed." God had not deceived him: for he had told the prophet, in the first instance, "that all the princes, and priests, and people of the land, should fight against him." But it is probable that the prophet had interpreted too strictly the promise with which God had encouraged him to undertake the prophetic office; namely, "They shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, to deliver thee[c]." It seems that he had expected an exemption from

[a] ver. 3, 4. [b] ver. 7, 14—17. [c] Jer. i. 18, 19.

actual suffering; whereas, the promise referred only to final victory: and, under this disappointment, he determined to "make no more mention of God, and to speak no more in his name."

Now, somewhat of a similar spirit is apt to prevail in us, when we labour under discouragement—

1. In our efforts for the good of others—

[Ministers, when, after long-continued exertions, they find that, instead of benefiting others, they have only brought evil on themselves, are apt to complain, that "they have laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought:" and, under these painful feelings, they either desert their post, or regret at least that they ever engaged in such an unprofitable employment. Moses, the meekest of the human race, greatly erred in this very way[d]——— As did Joshua also, after his entrance into Canaan[e]——— And in like manner, not only ministers, over their people, mourn, but parents over their children, masters over their servants, and teachers over the poor whom they endeavour to instruct: and too often does their want of success, and a sad return of evil for good, make them weary of their labours, and ready to abandon them altogether.]

2. In our exertions for our own souls—

[Persons, when first "enticed" or "persuaded" to embrace the Gospel, fondly imagine that they shall go forward in the divine life with ease: but when they come to find what conflicts they have to sustain, and what slow progress they make, they are greatly discouraged, and almost ready to blame even God himself, as having disappointed their expectations. They may not go so far as to say, "There is no hope: I have loved idols, and after them will I go[f]:" but with a mixture of querulousness and despondency, many a pious man will harbour the thought, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God[g]." And how enervating such an apprehension must be, it is scarcely needful for me to declare.]

But on the other hand our text exhibits,

II. The effect of piety on a discouraged soul—

Jeremiah attempted, for a season, to execute his rash determination: but he could not persist in his purpose: for the word of God was like a burning fire in his bones; so that he could not refrain from declaring it, as he had done before, if by any means he

[d] Exod. v. 22, 23.
[e] Josh. vii. 7.
[f] Jer. ii. 25.
[g] Isai. xl. 27.

might at last succeed in bringing his audience to repentance. And thus will grace work in every soul, even under the deepest discouragements. It will operate,

1. To shame our querulous impatience—

[When David had given vent to querulous and unbelieving expressions, he corrected himself, and acknowledged that they were the fruit of his own infirmity[h]. And we also shall blush, when we look back upon the dissatisfaction which we have expressed at the small success of our efforts. What if, in relation to others, we are constrained to say, "Who hath believed our report?" It is nothing but what Prophets and Apostles have said before us. And, if we cannot benefit others to the extent we could wish, it should satisfy us that we have done what we could for them, and for the honour of our God. If He be glorified, we should be content with any thing whereby his glory may be advanced[i]. And if he delay to accomplish in us our desires, we should wait his appointed time, in meek submission to his will[k].]

2. To revive our languid hopes—

[Grace will bring to our view the promises of God; not a jot or tittle of which can ever fail. It will remind us that God is the same as ever: his "arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear." "Against hope, it will lead us to believe in hope;" and will determine us, even "though he should slay us, yet firmly and immoveably to trust in him."]

3. To resuscitate our drooping energies—

[Our hands may hang down for a time; but the operation of divine grace will raise them up again. Jeremiah was weary with forbearing, even more than he had been with executing the work that had been assigned him. And so shall we be, if grace have its perfect work within us. Our labours, both ministerial and personal, will be renewed; that at least we may have the testimony of our own conscience, that whatever failure there be, it is not for want of exertion on our part to prevent it. God has said, "Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not." And if he be with us, we shall, in dependence on his word, go forward, "steadfast and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."]

ADDRESS—

[h] Ps. lxxiii. 12—16. and lxxvii. 7—10.
[i] Isai. xlix. 5. [k] Hab. ii. 3.

1. Expect discouragements in every part of your duty—

[Who amongst the saints was ever exempt from them? and who is not taught to expect them? They are God's appointed means for trying our faith and love, and for increasing every divine grace within us. If we are soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must expect conflicts, and pass through them to the attainment of the crown.]

2. Make them occasions of glorifying God the more—

[If we have fightings without and fears within, we must go the more earnestly to God for help, and rely the more firmly on his promised aid. Instead of sinking under discouragements of any kind, we must say to every enemy that obstructs our way, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerrubbabel thou shalt become a plain."]

OUTLINE NO. 1060

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jer. xxiii. 6. *This is his name whereby he shall be called,* THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE writings of the Prophets no less than of the Apostles testify of Christ: nor can we any where find a fuller exhibition of his character than in the words before us. As to *his origin,* he is "a branch from the root of David;" and, in *his character,* "a righteous" branch. *His office* is that of "a King;" and, as to *the manner in which he executes that office,* "he executes righteousness and judgment in the land." Look we for *the effects of his administration?* "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely." Lastly, Would we know *in what light he is to be regarded?* "This is his name, whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."

In these words the prophet sets forth,

I. The dignity of Christ—

The inspired writers never seem afraid of speaking of Christ in too exalted terms. The prophet, in this very place, declares,

1. His essential dignity—

[There is frequent occasion to observe that, wherever the word LORD is printed in large characters, it is in the original JEHOVAH. Now Jehovah denotes the self-existence of the Deity, and is a name incommunicable to any creature: yet is it here assigned to Christ. By comparing similar declarations in the Old Testament with the expositions given of them in the New, we know assuredly that this name belongs to Christ; and that therefore he is and must be "God over all, blessed for ever[a]."]

2. His official dignity—

[The title of Jehovah belongs equally to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; but the additional title of "*Our Righteousness*," is peculiar to Christ alone. It imports that Christ has by his own obedience unto death wrought out a righteousness for guilty man; and that "this righteousness shall be unto all and upon all them that believe in him." It is in this sense that St. Paul speaks of him as "made unto us righteousness[b]."

The connexion between the different parts of this comprehensive name deserves particular notice: for, if He were not Jehovah, he could not be our Righteousness; seeing that as a creature, he could *merit* nothing; because he would *owe* to God all that he could do; and, "after he had done all, he would be only an unprofitable servant:" but as he is God, all which he does is voluntary; and his divinity stamps an infinite value upon his work; so that it may well merit, not for himself only, but for a ruined world—

Such is the dignity of our blessed Lord: He is Jehovah, one with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal: nor is there one ransomed soul in heaven, who does not ascribe his salvation to the blood and righteousness of this our incarnate God.]

While the prophet thus expatiates on the glory of Christ, he intimates also,

II. The duty of man—

Our duty as sinners, and as redeemed sinners, has especial respect to Christ: and it is summarily comprehended in the ascribing to Christ the honour due unto his name. But this must be done,

1. In faith—

[a] Isai. vi. 5. with John xii. 41. or Isai. xlv. 22, 23. with Rom. xiv. 10, 11. or Joel ii. 32. with Rom. x. 13, 14. or Mal. iii. 1. with Luke i. 76.

[b] 1 Cor. i. 30.

[To compliment Christ with any titles which we do not believe due to him, would be to insult him, like those who arrayed him in mock majesty, and cried, Hail, King of the Jews! We must fully believe him to be God: we must be persuaded that we neither have, nor can have, any righteousness of our own: and we must be assured, that "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[c]." If we entertain any idea of meriting any thing at God's hands by our own obedience, or of adding any thing of our own to his perfect righteousness, we dishonour and degrade him; and, instead of performing our duty towards him, we violate it in the most flagrant manner: and, though we may be actuated by a blind zeal for the Father's honour, or for the interest of morality, we are indeed rebels against God, since he has commanded that "all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father," and that they should call him in faith, *The Lord our Righteousness.*]

2. In sincerity—

[As, to give him a title which we do not believe due to him would be mockery, so, to give it without a correspondent regard to him would be hypocrisy. Do we believe him to be Jehovah? we must regard him with reverential awe, and yield ourselves up to him in unreserved obedience. Do we believe him to be the only Righteousness of the redeemed? we must renounce entirely our own righteousness, and depend on him with our whole hearts. Do we view him in his complex character as Jehovah our Righteousness? We must rejoice in having such an almighty friend, such a sure foundation. We must glory in him as "all our salvation, and all our desire." A less regard to him than this, not only falls below our duty, but is absolutely inconsistent with any scriptural hope, any prospect of salvation.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The way of salvation—

[There are but *three* ways in which we can conceive it possible for any man to be saved; namely, by works, by faith *and* works, or by faith *without* works; and the subject before us plainly declares which is the true one. Are we to be saved by our works? No: for God would never have sent his Son to be our righteousness, if we ever could have wrought out a sufficient righteousness of our own. Besides, our own works would then have been our righteousness, and the name here ascribed to Christ would not have belonged to him. Moreover, even in heaven itself, instead of ascribing "Salvation to God

[c] Rom. x. 4.

and to the Lamb," we must have ascribed it to God and to ourselves.

Are we then to be saved by faith *and* works? We still answer, No: for in whatever degree we trust in our own works, in that degree do we rob Christ of his official dignity; and assume to ourselves the honour due to him alone. As far as our own merits are united with his as a joint ground of our acceptance with God, so far shall we have to all eternity a ground of glorying in ourselves; yea, so far salvation will cease to be of grace; whereas "it is of faith that it may be by grace, and that boasting may be for ever excluded[d]."

Salvation must then be by faith *without* works, (*not without works as its fruits and effects;* but altogether without them, *as a ground of our acceptance before God:*) we must not endeavour either in whole or in part to "establish a righteousness of our own," but seek to be clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness. This is the declaration of God himself[e]; nor did the Apostles themselves know any other way of salvation[f]. We must all therefore desire, with St. Paul, to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his, even his alone[g].]

2. The excellency of that way—

[What can be conceived more *comfortable to man* than to hear of such a salvation as this? Were we told that we must work out a righteousness of our own that should be commensurate with the demands of God's law, who could entertain a hope of ever effecting it? If we were required to do something that should be worthy to be joined with the Saviour's merits in order to render them more effectual for our acceptance, where should we find one single work of ours that we could present to God as perfect, and as deserving of so great a reward? The best man on earth must either sit down in despair, or live in continual suspense respecting his eternal welfare. But the righteousness of Jehovah appears at once, not only adequate to our wants, but to the wants of all mankind; and, by trusting in that, we find rest unto our souls. Nor can we devise any other method of acceptance so *honourable to God;* since it refers all the glory to him; and necessitates all the hosts of the redeemed to ascribe the honour of their salvation to him alone. In spite of all the objections too that are urged against it, we can affirm that it is eminently *conducive* to the practice of *holiness.* Can we think of God becoming man in order to work out a righteousness for us, and not feel a desire to serve and honour him? "Can we continue

[d] Rom. iv. 16. Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[e] Rom. iv. 5.
[f] Gal. ii. 16.
[g] Phil. iii. 9.

in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." An inspired writer assures us that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world."

Let us then seek our righteousness in Christ alone; but let us shew by our lives, that this doctrine of faith is indeed "a doctrine according to godliness."]

OUTLINE NO. 1061

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

Jer. xxiii. 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*

MEN universally encourage themselves in sin, from the hopes of impunity. But they are under a fatal delusion: for however secret their iniquities may be, there is One who beholds them, with all their aggravating circumstances, and will bring them forth to the light, as grounds of his righteous indignation. The false prophets of old imagined that their pretensions to inspiration would subject them to no danger, provided they could preserve appearances before men; but God expostulates with them in the words before us, and appeals to their own consciences for a testimony against them. He appeals to them respecting the omnipresence of the Deity; to which important subject we would now call your attention,

I. In a way of rational inquiry—

The Heathen believed their gods to be confined to particular temples, or to certain districts[a]: but can we imagine that JEHOVAH is thus limited?

Consult reason—

[Is God the Creator of the world? How then can he be absent from any part of it, seeing that he must have been present with the whole at the time he formed it? Is he the Governor of the world? how then can he be limited to any place, since he must be every where, to direct and manage those events, which, without his superintending providence, would throw the universe into confusion. Is he God? if he

[a] 1 Kings xx. 23.

be, he must be perfect; but if he be circumscribed by space, he must be imperfect; he must be ignorant of those things which he cannot behold, and impotent in respect of those things which he cannot reach.]

Consult Scripture—

[The sacred records testify that he is in heaven; for "he dwelleth in the high and holy place[b]." Yet they do not limit him to heaven; for "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him[c]." He is spoken of as existing upon earth; for "in him we live, and move, and have our being[d]." Yet it is not in any particular part of the earth that he exists; for "he filleth all in all[e]."]

Consult conscience—

[Every man who has ever heard of God has within him a consciousness that the Divine Being is present with him, and is privy to his most secret thoughts. In the midst of their wickedness indeed men try to persuade themselves that God does not see them[f]: but in seasons of reflection they cannot divest themselves of the conviction, that his all-seeing eye penetrates the inmost recesses of their hearts. What David confessed with joy, they feel with terror and dismay; that, whether they be in heaven, earth, or hell, they cannot for one moment escape the notice of their God[g].

God is said indeed to have dwelt in the temple, and in the bush; and to be "far from the wicked:" but all such expressions relate, not to his essence, but to the manifestations of his presence. In every possible view, *the appeal* made to us in the text defies an answer, and precludes a doubt.]

Not to rest in mere theories, let the same subject be considered,

II. In a way of practical improvement—

Numberless are the truths which this subject would suggest to our minds; but we must of necessity confine ourselves to a few of the most important:

1. What folly is it to commit sin under the idea of secrecy!

[That such folly obtains in the world, is manifest to all. The thief takes advantage of his privacy to lay his hand upon his neighbour's property. The adulterer watches for the return of night, when he may accomplish his wicked purposes without

[b] Isai. lvii. 15. [c] 1 Kings viii. 27. [d] Acts xvii. 28.
[e] Eph. i. 23. [f] Gen. iii. 8. Job xxii. 13, 14. Ps. xciv. 7.
[g] Ps. cxxxix. 1—12.

detection[h]. Sinners of every description commit in secret what they would not dare to perpetrate, if they knew that the eyes of their fellow-creatures were upon them. But whence is this, unless from the atheistical conceit that God is not privy to their actions, or from an utter forgetfulness of his presence? Such conduct however is folly in the extreme: for God's eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good[i]." "The darkness is no darkness to him: the night and the day to him are both alike:" and, as he observes, so will he also "bring to light, the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart[k]," as a ground of that sentence which he will one day pass upon all the workers of iniquity.

Let this be remembered in reference to all the sins we have ever committed in secret; and let it teach us to seek the remission of them while yet the day of mercy is continued to us.]

2. How vain are the hopes of the hypocrite!

[It is no very difficult matter to impose upon men: yea, we may also deceive our ownselves; but we cannot deceive God. However specious our conduct may be, he will discern our corrupt motives and principles, and will judge us according to the real quality of our actions. There is one way, and only one, in which we can hide our sins from God; and that is, by fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge: then, though God will behold the sinner, he will not behold the sin; for it shall all be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and be "cast behind him into the depths of the sea:" the vilest sinner in the universe, if he "be found in Christ," shall be "complete[l]," "without spot or blemish[m]." Such a hiding-place is Christ[n]; and such shall be the felicity of all that believe in him[o]. But it is in vain to hope that by any other means we shall escape the wrath of God: for "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do;" and every sin not purged away by the blood of Jesus shall be visited with just and everlasting judgments.]

3. How secure are they who put their trust in God!

[Many of the enemies with whom the Christian has to contend, are hidden from his view: but neither they nor any of their devices are concealed from the eyes of God. He is everywhere present to protect his people, and to defeat the plots of their adversaries. He it is that has given to our enemies the strength and wisdom which they exert against us; and he engages that "none of the weapons which they form against us shall prosper[p]." "Let the weak then say, I am

[h] Job xxiv. 15—17. [i] Prov. xv. 3. [k] 1 Cor. iv. 5.
[l] Col. ii. 10. [m] Eph. v. 27. [n] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[o] Acts x. 43. [p] Isai. liv. 16, 17.

strong:" for "if God be for them, who shall be against them?" Only let them "acknowledge him in all their ways," and depend upon him in all their trials, and they need not fear[q] for "his eyes shall run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in their behalf[r]."]

[q] Ps. xlvi. 1, 2. [r] 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

OUTLINE NO. 1062

FIDELITY REQUIRED IN MINISTERS.

Jer. xxiii. 28, 29, *He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces?*

OF all the different orders of mankind, there is not any that is more influential on society than that of ministers. The prophets of old, if truly faithful to their God, were means and instruments of diffusing incalculable blessings through the countries where they lived. The false prophets, on the contrary, hardened the people in their wickedness, and brought down the heaviest judgments on those whom they misled. Ministers of the present day produce similar effects, only on a more contracted scale. The prophets, whether true or false, were listened to as inspired; and, consequently, as bearing an authority far beyond what any minister at this time can assume. But still, as expounders of God's revealed will, we are listened to with much respect and deference; and we are the means of dispensing much good or evil to our auditors, according as we approve ourselves faithful or unfaithful to the office we sustain, and to the Master whom we profess to serve. This is strongly intimated in the passage before us; in which we have,

I. A solemn injunction to all who bear the office of the ministry—

As ministers, the word of God is put into our hands, and a dispensation is committed to us to preach it; and that office we must execute "faithfully:" we must speak the word,

1. Unreservedly, without concealment—

[We must "declare unto our people the whole counsel of God[a]," and "not keep back from them any thing that can be profitable unto them[b]." We are at liberty indeed to consider what is suited to the state of our hearers, and what they are capable of receiving[c]. Our object must be, to benefit their souls[d]: and, consequently, we do well to adapt our instructions to their capacities, administering "milk to babes, and meat to those who are of full age[e]." But in this discrimination we must not be regulated by carnal policy; but must act as before God, "not handling the word of God deceitfully, but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God[f]." Our motto must be that of the Apostle Paul: "We are not as many who corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ[g]."]

2. Impartially, without respect of persons—

[All idea of pleasing men must be utterly abandoned: for if we please men, or seek to do so, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ[h]. St. Peter erred in this respect, when, for the sake of gratifying the Jewish converts, he inculcated, even on the Gentiles, the observance of the Jewish ritual[i]. The fidelity of Paul is that which we ought to follow. He says, "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the Apostles of Christ[k]." Whether we address rich or poor, we must "use great plainness of speech; not as Moses, putting a veil upon our face[l];" but, as with unveiled face, exhibiting before our people the great mystery of godliness, if by any means "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, may shine unto them[m]."]

3. Boldly, without fear—

[The prophets of old were enjoined "not to fear the face of man, even though briers and thorns should be with them, and they should dwell among scorpions:" and to speak

[a] Acts xx. 27. [b] Acts xx. 20. [c] Mark iv. 33.
[d] Prov. xi. 30. [e] 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 11—14.
[f] 2 Cor. iv. 2. [g] 2 Cor. ii. 17. [h] Gal. i. 10.
[i] Gal. ii. 11—14. [k] 1 Thess. ii. 3—6. [l] 2 Cor. iii. 12, 13.
[m] 2 Cor. iv. 5, 6.

boldly all that God had commanded, lest he should, in just indignation for their cowardice, confound them before their people[n]. We must expect to meet with opposition: for who, amongst the Prophets or Apostles, ever escaped it? Even our blessed Lord himself, with all his wisdom and grace, was an object of hatred to an ungodly world: and we must expect, that "they who hate the light" will hate us who set it before them[o]. But, however we be menaced, our answer to every opponent must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard[p]." And, if we be called to seal the truth with our blood, we must regard it rather as an honour than a shame[q], and rather as a ground of congratulation than a subject of condolence[r].]

This injunction is further enforced by,

II. An unanswerable appeal to the whole world—

Here is an appeal,

1. To our judgment—

[Every one knows what a light and worthless thing "chaff is, in comparison of wheat." And is not the application of this image to the subject before us both clear and obvious? Of what use were the assertions of the false prophets? They only deceived the people to their ruin. Look, on the other hand, at the labours of Moses, of David, of Elijah, of Paul: who can estimate the value of their services? So it is, in a measure, with every minister of Christ, who truly and faithfully discharges the high office committed to him. He feeds many, he nourishes many, comforts many, yea, and "saves many souls from death[s]." God declares, that this effect should have followed the ministrations of former prophets, if they had been truly upright: "If they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings[t]." And though there doubtless is a great difference between the labours of different men in point of real efficiency, even whilst substantially they preach the same truths, yet the labours of those who bring forth a mixed and mutilated Gospel are not to be compared with those of a faithful servant of Christ, who "preaches the truth in love," and exemplifies it in his life and conversation.]

2. To our experience—

[n] Jer. i. 8, 17. and Ezek. ii. 6, 7.
[o] John iii. 19, 20.
[p] Acts iv. 19, 20.
[q] Acts v. 41.
[r] Phil. ii. 17, 18.
[s] 1 Tim. iv. 16. and Jam. v. 20.
[t] ver. 22.

[God's word, if faithfully declared, is "quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword[u]." Let any one, that has ever noticed its effects, say, whether it is not "like fire," which dissolves the hardest metal; and "like a hammer, which breaks in pieces" even adamant itself. Go to the populous city of Nineveh, and see all orders of men, from the greatest to the least, dissolved in tears at the preaching of one single prophet[x]: or look back to the day of Pentecost, when, by the preaching of Peter, three thousand persons, with their hands yet reeking with the Saviour's blood, were converted to the Lord. Are not these instances sufficient to shew what wonders the word of God is able to effect? Verily, "it is mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan, and to the bringing of even the very thoughts of men into captivity to the obedience of Christ[y]."

Say, then, whether these be not cogent arguments for fidelity in the exercise of the ministerial functions? The exhibition of false doctrines saves no man, benefits no man: but a simple preaching of "Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation" to millions of the human race[z]. To this, many of you, I trust, can bear testimony; yea, and I hope are living witnesses of its truth; in that "ye have turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, even Jesus, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come[a]."]

And NOW,

1. Let me discharge, as I am able, my duty to you—

["To me is committed the word of God for you; and woe is unto me, if I preach it not with all fidelity[b]!" If so much as one of you should perish through a want of faithfulness on my part, his blood would be required at my hands[c]. You must not expect me, therefore, to "prophesy unto you smooth things," or to "speak peace to you when there is no peace." No: I must, at the peril of my soul, "speak God's word unto you faithfully." Now, there are three things which I do, and must, require at your hands. The first of these is, *repentance* — — — And I must declare unto you, that "except ye repent," truly, deeply, and from your inmost souls repent, "ye shall all, all without exception, perish." The next thing which I must call for, is *faith*, even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour of the world — — — And I must warn you, that without *this* there is no hope: for "there

[u] Heb. iv. 12. [x] Jonah iii. 4—10. [y] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.
[z] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. Rom. i. 16. [a] 1 Thess. i. 5, 9, 10.
[b] 1 Cor. ix. 16, 17. [c] Ezek. xxxiii. 6—8.

is no other foundation on which any man can build," "nor any other name given under heaven whereby any man can be saved." In addition to this, I must also require *obedience*, even a spiritual, cheerful, unreserved obedience to every command of God——— And in the name of Almighty God I declare, that "without works all your faith is dead," and, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."]

2. Let me call on you to make a due improvement of my testimony—

[True it is, that even "though Paul should plant and Apollos water," they would, if left to themselves, labour only in vain. "It is God alone that can give the increase" to the seed that is sown. But this will be no excuse for you, who make the word of no avail. If you would pray unto God, he would hear you: if you would seek his blessing, he would give it you: if you would desire him to clothe his word with power, he would accompany it with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Remember, I pray you, that the word delivered, if it be not "a savour of life unto life, will become unto you a savour of death unto death." True it is, that the "fire" burns but dimly, and the "hammer" is but feebly applied: still, if God would by his Spirit kindle the flame, it should be sufficient to burn even to your inmost souls: and if he would reveal his mighty arm, no rock in the universe should be able to withstand its force. "He has put his treasure in earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power may appear to be of Him:" and he delights to "perfect his own strength in his people's weakness." It is this that encourages me to speak; and it may well also encourage you to hear. Look to Him, then, to use his wonder-working rod, as in the days of old; and to accomplish by it the redemption and salvation of your souls.]

OUTLINE NO. 1063

RELIGION IS NOT A SOURCE OF EVIL TO THOSE WHO EMBRACE IT.

Jer. xxv. 5, 6. *Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings . . . . . And I will do you no hurt.*

SIN is the greatest of all evils; because it is the source from which all evils flow. Nor can the miseries which it has introduced be ever remedied, but by a thorough turning unto God. This, Jeremiah tells

us, was the remedy prescribed by *all the prophets*[a]: and certainly it is the only one that can ever prove effectual.

The passage, from whence the text is taken, contains, in addition to the words which we have cited, a dehortation or dissuasion from idolatry; together with an intimation that a continuance in that sin would accelerate their ruin, and insure their exclusion from the promised land: they would persist in it "*to their hurt*[b]." On the contrary, if they would return to God, he would forbear to inflict upon them his threatened judgments, and "*do them no hurt.*"

But we omit that which related to the temporal state of the Jews, in order that we may fix your attention more immediately upon that part of the subject which is applicable to all persons in all ages of the world.

The text consists of,

I. An exhortation—

As idolatry was at that time the national sin of the Jews, so every one has some evil way to which he is more particularly addicted. We cannot pretend to trace all the shades of difference that are found in different men: we will rather arrange the whole under three great and comprehensive classes; to one or other of which, all, except true Christians, belong. We therefore say, Turn,

1. From profaneness—

[That this is a common sin amongst us, needs no proof: we cannot open our eyes or our ears, but we must be speedily convinced of it — — —

Let then as many of you as have entertained licentious principles, or indulged in vicious practices, "turn from the evil of your doings," yea, turn from it speedily, and with utter abhorrence.]

2. From worldliness—

[While the young and gay are rushing into vice, and pouring contempt upon every thing that is serious, a great part of mankind are immersed in worldly cares, and are as regardless of religion as their more dissipated brethren — — —

[a] ver. 4. with the text. [b] ver. 7.

True it is, that these persons have more specious grounds on which to vindicate their conduct, inasmuch as it seems nearly allied to prudence and diligence. Still, however, while we highly approve of those virtues, we cannot but condemn a worldly spirit as evil; since it is declared to be incompatible with the love of God[c]: and therefore we say to all, "Turn from it," lest you deceive yourselves to your utter ruin.]

3. From formality—

[There is a very considerable number of persons, whose strictness of principle, and correctness of manners, screen them effectually against any charge of profaneness; while their indifference to riches and aggrandizement shews, that they are not open, in any great degree, to the imputation of worldliness. But their religion consists in a mere round of duties, in which they have no real enjoyment of God, but only a self-righteous, self-complacent approbation of their own minds — — —

That this also is evil, we cannot doubt, if only we bear in mind that God requires our *hearts*[d]; and that every service, in which the heart is not engaged, is declared to be vain and worthless in his sight[e].

In exhorting such persons to turn from the evil of their doings, we would by no means be understood to discourage diligence in attending on divine ordinances, whether public or private; but only to guard against a resting in the performance of duties, and a substituting of that in the place of Christ. In appreciating our religious observances, let us judge of them by their spirituality, and by our enjoyment of God in them: and, if they be ever so devout, still let us remember that they make no atonement for sin, nor do they confer any obligation whatever upon God: yea, rather the more devout they are, the more we are indebted to God for that grace whereby we are so enabled to worship him.]

To confirm the exhortation, God has been pleased to add,

II. A promise—

At first sight the promise appears to be unworthy of God, and incapable of affording any great encouragement to those to whom it is made. But, if taken altogether abstractedly, it surely is no light matter for those who deserve all the judgments that God can inflict, to be assured, that he will never do them any hurt: and, if considered in connexion with our fears

[c] 1 John ii. 15—17. [d] Prov. xxxiii. 26.
[e] Matt. xv. 8, 9. Compare 2 Tim. iii. 5.

and apprehensions, it will be found to contain the richest consolation. *In this view,* we observe, God will do us no hurt in respect of,

1. Our intellect—

[When we begin in earnest to be religious, our friends are ready to suppose that we are, or shall soon be, beside ourselves[f]: nor can we altogether wonder at their judgment, when we consider how great the change is, (like a river turning back to its source,) and how unable they are to account for it. But they may spare themselves their fears; for God gives his people, not a spirit of delusion, but "of a *sound mind*[g]." The prodigal's return to his father's house was the first proof of sanity, not of insanity: nor has any person a spark of true wisdom in him, till he begin to fear the Lord[h]. In conversion, a man is made to form a correct judgment respecting his most important concerns; and not only to view things in the same light that God views them, but to act agreeably to those views. As well therefore might the man whose eyes Jesus had opened be said to have suffered injury in his organs of vision, as a person thus enlightened in his judgment be said to have suffered in his intellect[i].]

2. Our friends—

[We are taught to expect, that, on our becoming decided followers of Christ, "our greatest foes will be those of our own household[k]:" and experience accords with the declarations of Scripture on this head. But are we therefore injured in this respect? Our Lord has told us, and experience accords with that also, that if we lose any friends for his sake, he will repay us in kind, as it were, an hundred-fold[l]. A merchant who should part with his goods to such an advantage as this, would surely not be thought to have sustained any loss. But besides this recompence in the present world, God himself will be our friend, both now and for ever. And would not *this* amply repay the loss of all earthly friends?]

3. Our reputation—

[Though the whole of our conduct be visibly improved, yet shall we, on turning to God, be loaded with opprobrium

[f] See Mark iii. 21. Acts xxvi. 24. 2 Cor. v. 13.
[g] 2 Tim. i. 7. [h] Ps. cxi. 10.
[i] That people who are insane, may fix their thoughts upon religion, or that a person may become distracted by *misapprehensions* of religion, is confessed: but if religion would drive a man mad, the more religious he was, the more likely to be mad. Who does not shudder at the consequences that would result from that opinion?
[k] Matt. x. 35 36. [l] Mark x. 29, 30.

and contempt; and though something may be gained by prudence, or conceded to us on account of our celebrity in learning, there is no religious person that occupies the same place in the estimation of the world that he would do if he were not religious. If our Lord himself was "despised and rejected of men[m]," and the Apostles were deemed "the off-scouring of all things[n]," it is in vain for us to expect honour from man[o]. But are we therefore without honour? No: our very disgrace, when so procured, is a very high honour, inasmuch as it assimilates us to Christ[p], and is a testimony to us of our fidelity[q]. But suppose that ignominy had nothing to counterbalance it here, should we have any reason to regret it when Christ "confessed us before his Father, and his holy angels;" and when they who despised us, shall "awake to shame and everlasting contempt[r]?"]

4. Our interests—

[The laws of the land certainly afford us a very great protection. Nevertheless it is no uncommon thing at this day for children and servants to be called to make very great sacrifices for the Gospel sake. But be it so: they are forced, like St. Paul, to serve the Lord "in coldness and nakedness," and in a privation of all earthly comforts. But are they eventually "hurt?" What if their spiritual consolations be proportioned to their temporal afflictions; have they not made a good exchange? Is not peace in the bosom incomparably better than money in the purse? The riches of this world are easily appreciated: but those which Christ imparts, are "unsearchable." Their despisers would, at a future day, give all the world for a drop of water only to cool their tongue. How rich then must they be who are drinking living waters eternally at the fountain head!]

5. Our happiness—

[Doubtless the godly have grounds of mourning peculiar to themselves: but are they therefore losers in respect of happiness? No: their sorrows, if I may so speak, are sources of joy: they would on no account be without them: they rather regret that they cannot sorrow more: they mourn because they cannot mourn, and weep because they cannot weep: and if at any time they have been enabled to abase themselves before God in dust and ashes, they look back upon such seasons as the most precious in their whole lives. But if they have sorrows unknown to others, have they not "joys also, with which the stranger intermeddleth not?" Let a promise be applied

[m] Isai. liii. 3. [n] 1 Cor. iv. 13.
[o] Matt. x. 24, 25. with John. v. 44.
[p] 1 Pet. iv. 13. [q] Luke xxi. 13. [r] Dan. xii. 2.

with power to their souls, or "the love of God be shed abroad in their hearts," have they not a very foretaste of heaven upon earth? Compare their state with that of others, on a dying bed: follow them in the instant of their departure from the body: see them welcomed to the bosom of their Lord: contemplate their eternal state, in contrast with that of those who despised them; and then say whether they have any reason to complain, that their fidelity to God occasioned on the whole a diminution of their happiness?]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet following their evil ways—

[One question I beg leave to put to you: Will God "do YOU no hurt?" Inquire, I pray you: search the sacred records: see what God has spoken respecting sin and sinners: Will it do you no hurt to bear his wrath, and to drink of the cup of his indignation to all eternity? — — — We inquire not, What are the ways you follow? if you do not turn from *every* evil way to God, and devote yourself unreservedly to your Lord and Saviour, the issue will be the same, whatever course you take. Your guilt may be more or less aggravated, and your misery be apportioned accordingly: but, without entering into the different degrees of punishment, let me ask, Will not *sin* be visited with the wrath of God? and will *that* do you no *hurt?* — — — On the other hand, would not God do you *good*, if you would return unto him? — — — "Turn then from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[s]."]

2. Those who are turning from their evil ways—

[Halt not between two opinions: strive not to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and mammon[t]. "If Baal be God, follow him: but if the Lord be God, then follow him." There is a certain kind of turning unto God, by which you will suffer hurt on every side, and receive no benefit whatever. If your "heart be not whole with God," no good can accrue to you, nor can any evil be averted from you. The world will not approve of you, because you are too precise for them: and God will not approve of you, because you are not upright before him. Be not then temporizing and hypocritical, but open, decided, and consistent characters. "Follow your Lord fully:" "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach[u]." Thus, though "your life may be accounted madness, and your end to be without honour, yet shall you be numbered among the children of God, and have your lot among his saints[x]."]

[s] Ezek. xviii. 30.
[t] Matt. vi. 24.
[u] Heb. xiii. 13.
[x] Wisd. v. 4, 5.

OUTLINE NO. 1064

GOD WILL BE FOUND OF SINCERE WORSHIPPERS.

Jer. xxix. 11—13. *I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

THE calamities which God inflicts upon mankind in this world are intended to bring them to repentance; and though he often removes his rod in anger, when he sees that it produces not the desired effect, yet he often continues to punish till he sees that the heart is humbled for its iniquity. Thus he dealt with the Jews whom he sent captive to Babylon. They at first despised his chastening, and promised themselves a speedy return to their native land: but he declared that their captivity should be protracted to the end of seventy years; and that, at the expiration of that time, when they should have learned to acknowledge him, he would again appear for them, and bring them back in answer to their fervent petitions. His declaration respecting this suggests to us two important observations:

I. God's purposes of love and peace shall all in due time be accomplished—

God has "thoughts of peace" towards many who never think of him—

[Even before the foundation of the world God determined to remedy the evils which he foresaw sin would bring upon mankind. When our first parents were ruined, and fled from his face, he sought them out and communicated to them his gracious intentions relative to the substitution of his Son, in their stead. And while the Jews were imbruing their hands in the blood of his Son, it was his fixed purpose to pour down his Spirit upon them, and to bring them into a state of reconciliation with himself. And have we not also reason to confess, that whatever we either possess or hope for is the result of his purpose and grace which he purposed in Christ Jesus before

the world began[a]? Yea, who can tell, but that, at this moment, some careless sinner is the object of his special attention, and that this is the very hour, wherein his merciful designs shall be matured and executed?]

These thoughts of his shall all in due season be accomplished—

[It may be a long time before his eternal counsels are manifested by visible and correspondent acts. But not one of his purposes shall ever be frustrated. Paul was "a chosen vessel unto him," and "separated, in the Divine intentions, from his mother's womb[b]: but how long was he suffered to go on in the most inveterate enmity against Christ and his Gospel! Yet when his hour was come, God stopped him in his mad career, and transformed a bitter persecutor into a zealous Apostle. Thus it was that Zaccheus also was made a partaker of Christ's salvation, when he thought of nothing but gratifying a foolish curiosity[c]. And thus many of us also received our first serious impressions, when we were far enough from desiring to fear God. And it is a comfortable reflection, that many, who are yet dead in trespasses and sins, are in the Divine purpose "predestinated to the adoption of children[d]," and will one day be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."]

Nor shall any expectations founded upon his word be ever disappointed—

[Improbable as the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon was, God brought them out at the appointed time. And as he gave "them an expected end," so will he to all of us. If an ungodly man begin to look unto the Lord Jesus Christ for repentance and remission of sins, he shall not look to him in vain. If an afflicted or tempted soul flee to him for consolation and succour, the desired aid shall not be withheld. Provided only we rely on his word, and not on any presumptuous imaginations of our own, we may rest assured that he will interpose effectually on our behalf.]

But however fixed his purposes may be,

II. They must nevertheless be called forth by the exercise of fervent prayer—

God has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings—

[This is the universal voice of Scripture, "Ask, and ye shall have." Even where God most freely promises his blessings, he

[a] 2 Tim. i. 9. [b] Acts ix. 15. Gal. i. 15.
[c] Luke xix. 4, 5, 9. [d] Eph. i. 5

still says, "Nevertheless I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them[e]." We do not say that he never deviates from this method of conveying his mercies; for sometimes "he is found of them that sought him not, and known to them that inquired not after him[f]:" But the earnestness with which this duty of prayer is inculcated in the text, is of itself a sufficient proof that we are to expect no blessing without it. God would have us know, and feel our wants; and by opening them before him, get our own hearts affected with them. If at any time he vouchsafe his blessings to those who have not sought him, he instantly stirs them up to prayer, which is as necessary to the welfare of a regenerate soul, as breathing is to the existence of a new-born infant.]

Nor should a discovery of his purposes relax, but rather quicken, our diligence in prayer—

[This was the effect which was produced on Daniel as soon as ever he learned that the time fixed for Israel's captivity was near its termination[g]. Nor should it produce any other effect on us. As well might Hezekiah have declined the use of food because God had prolonged his life fifteen years, as we neglect the means of spiritual advancement, if we knew that God had predestinated us unto life. On the contrary, the certain prospect of success is our greatest encouragement to pray, and to comply with any terms which God has prescribed.]

If we use these means aright, we may be sure we shall attain whatsoever his unerring wisdom sees to be good for us—

[God has "never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain[h]." On the contrary he will "hearken" to our cry with parental tenderness, he will discover to the inquiring soul the riches of his grace, and "enable us to comprehend with all saints the height and depth of his love which passeth knowledge." But then we must pray in earnest and, "search for him with our *whole* heart[i]" It is not a mere listless petition that will prevail with him; we may ask and *not* have, if we thus ask amiss:" but importunate and believing prayer shall bring down every blessing which God himself is able to bestow.]

This subject will be found of peculiar USE,

1. To humble the proud—

[Every natural man conceives that his salvation must arise solely from his own exertions. But here we are taught to

[e] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [f] Isai. lxv. 1. [g] Dan. ix. 2—4.
[h] Isai. xlv. 19. [i] Lev. xxvi. 40, 41. Deut. iv. 29.

trace all our inclination and ability for what is good to God, who, in the prosecution of his eternal purposes, imparts both the one and the other to our souls[k]. Let us learn, then, to acknowledge him in all that we have received, and to look to him for all that we want. And let the hope, that there may yet be in his heart many undiscovered thoughts of peace towards us, stimulate us to fervent prayer, and diligent exertions.]

2. To awaken the secure—

[Some will pervert the truths of God, and say that their exertions are *useless*, if God have not thoughts of peace towards them; and *superfluous*, if he have. But God's decrees are no rule of action for us, seeing that they are hidden from us: it is his precepts, which we are to regard; and if we will not seek him according to his command, we can have no hope that we shall ever find him. Will any man then consign himself deliberately to perdition, because he does not absolutely know that God has "ordained him unto life?" Should we not justly blame a man who made the uncertainty of life a reason for refusing bodily sustenance? yet he would act as rationally as the other. Let this then be known; the man that lives without God, will die without hope; and, when he perishes, he must accuse, not the hidden purposes of God, but his own folly, sloth, and negligence.]

3. To comfort the feeble-minded—

[Some, who are diligent in the use of means, are apt to perplex themselves with doubts respecting the Divine decrees. But they have within themselves the very best answer to all their doubts: let them only ask themselves, Whence arose my desires after God? Whence is it that I am enabled to seek him in any measure? The snare will then instantly be broken: for, the aid they have already received from God, is a far better ground for concluding that he has designs of peace towards them, than any remaining imperfections can be, of his purpose to reject them. Only then wait upon God in prayer, and rest assured that a praying soul can never perish. Continue to ask, and you shall have; for however secret his *purposes* may be, his *promises* are plain and sure: and he says, "Ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart."]

[k] See also Eph. i. 11. and Phil. ii. 13.

OUTLINE NO. 1065

GOD'S GRACIOUS DESIGNS TOWARDS HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.

Jer. xxx. 10, 11. *Fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, I yet will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.*

THE peculiar importance of these words may be judged of from hence, that the prophet, without any apparent necessity, or indeed any visible connexion, introduces them again, towards the close of his prophecies[a]. But the subject of them is so consolatory, and the view which they open to us of God's future dispensations is so glorious, that they may well be proposed to our most attentive consideration. Respecting their primary import we can have no doubt. They look forward to a period far beyond the return of the Jews from Babylon, even to that blessed period, when the whole nation shall be converted to the faith of Christ, and be restored to the possession of the land of Canaan[b]. That such a period shall arrive, we have the strongest and most unequivocal declarations of Holy Writ[c]: and it becomes us all to look forward to it with confidence and joy.

But we must not so contemplate the future good of others, as to overlook our own personal and immediate welfare. The words before us convey most comfortable tidings to ourselves; which therefore we shall advert to in connexion with the event to which they more especially refer: and in order to this we shall deduce from them some general observations. Observe then,

I. That God has glorious things in reserve for his chosen people—

1. For the Jewish people—

[a] Jer. xlvi. 27, 28. [b] ver. 8, 9. [c] Compare Hos. iii. 5.

[There is certainly mercy in reserve for them: "their yoke has never been so broken from their neck, but that strangers have served themselves of them[d]," and do still oppress them. A season of happiness awaits them, such as they never experienced in their most prosperous days: "they shall be at rest, and be quiet, and none shall make them afraid:" and this outward peace shall be only a shadow of that inward joy which they shall experience under the protection of their reconciled God and Saviour, who will be "a little sanctuary unto them[e]."]

2. For his people among all nations—

[However "far off" his people are, God sees and knows them[f], and will in due season bring them to himself[g]. No enemy shall be able to detain them: their bonds shall be broken, and they shall be "brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." O what sweet peace and composure of mind shall they enjoy, when they are truly brought to the fold of Christ[h]! What blessed assurance too shall they possess, not only of their present interest in the Saviour, but of final victory and everlasting felicity[i]!

Yet is this but the beginning of blessings: the time shall come when the saints of all ages, even from the beginning to the end of time, shall be gathered together, every one of them freed from all remains of sin and sorrow, and raised to the fruition of their heavenly inheritance.

Shall we not then, whilst we contemplate the future destinies of God's ancient people, consider also our own; when, even *in this life*, such "things are prepared for us as no unrenewed eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived[k];" and, *in the world to come*, such things as exceed the comprehension whether of men or angels?]

Subservient to this great design, God orders every thing for them in love, so,

II. That even his darkest dispensations towards them are intended for their good—

This was, and still is, the case with respect to the Jews.

[The sending of that whole nation into captivity in Babylon was doubtless a heavy judgment: but yet we are expressly told that God designed it "for their good[l]." And we doubt not but that the destruction of their whole estate and polity by

[d] ver. 8. [e] Ezek. xi. 16, 17. with Jer. xxiii. 6.
[f] 2 Tim. ii. 19. [g] John x. 16. [h] Ps. xxiii. 1, 2.
[i] Ps. xxiii. 4—6. [k] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [l] Jer. xxiv. 5.

the Romans, together with their present dispersion over the face of the whole earth, is intended for their good also. By the Babylonish captivity they were cured of idolatry; and by the total abolition of the temple worship, all hope of obtaining mercy by the ceremonial rites and ceremonies is cut off, and they are "shut up unto the faith that is now revealed." We trust also that they are preparing to be God's honoured instruments of evangelizing the world; seeing that the receiving of them into the Church will be as life from the dead to the Gentile world[m]. We see clearly that there is an immense difference put between them and all the nations which once led them captive. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Romans, have ceased to exist as distinct kingdoms; and have been lost, as it were, among the people who subdued them: but the Jews are in every place a distinct people, and are so kept by God's overruling providence, that he may accomplish more manifestly his gracious purposes towards them. Many indeed, like Pharaoh, have sought their destruction; but they live as monuments of God's unceasing care and faithfulness.]

And may not we also see the hand of God ordering and overruling every thing for our good?

[His chastening hand may have been upon us; but the consolations and supports with which he has favoured us have almost changed the very nature of our afflictions. Besides, he has, like a skilful Refiner, apportioned our trials to our necessities; and always either increased our strength to sustain them, or provided for us a way to escape from them. Let any one of us look back, even the most afflicted amongst us, and say, Whether God has not corrected always "in *measure*[n]?" yea, whether his corrections have not "wrought for our good;" and whether, if our hearts be indeed right with God, they have not been "working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[o]?" Yes, "by these has our iniquity been purged; and the fruit of them has been to take away our sin[p]:" and in all that God may have inflicted on us, he has acted the part, not of an angry Judge, but of a loving Father[q].]

Well may God's people rejoice in such hopes as these, seeing,

III. That his presence with them is their never-failing security—

God did not so withdraw from the Jews in Babylon, but that he was with them to watch over them,

[m] Rom. xi. 15.
[n] Isai. xxvii. 7, 8.
[o] Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.
[p] Isai. xxvii. 9.
[q] Heb. xii. 6—8.

and to overrule events for their deliverance at the time appointed. Thus at this day he hears the cries of his afflicted people, and only waits till the appointed time to shew himself strong in their behalf. Thus is his presence with us our security also.

[He has promised "never to leave us nor forsake us[r]." In our troubles more especially has he engaged to be with us[s]. Nor will he ever leave us, till he has accomplished all the good pleasure of his goodness towards us[t]. Had it not been for his presence with his Church and people, their enemies would long since have triumphed over them: but because "he is with them to save them," they shall be "more than conquerors" over all their enemies, and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation."]

APPLICATION—

Thrice, in the parallel passage, does God repeat the exhortation, "Fear not[u]." We therefore will address that exhortation,

1. To those who are afar off—

[Look at the Jews in Babylon, or in their present state; What can be conceived more hopeless? — — — Yet they *were*, and *shall be* delivered. Let none then despair, as if they were beyond the reach of mercy: for "God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save;" and they shall "be brought nigh by the blood of Jesus," which is able to "cleanse from all sin."]

2. To those who are visited with any great affliction—

[You are apt to conclude, that, because you are afflicted, you are monuments of God's wrath. But God makes these very afflictions a subject of promise: "I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." He knows that without these afflictions you would never return to him, nor ever be purified from your dross: it is because you are a child, and not a bastard, that he thus visits you with his chastising rod. It was in this view of his dispensations that David said, "In very faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." Faithfulness has respect to a promise: and it is your privilege to see every one of your afflictions as the fruit of his faithfulness and love.]

3. To those who are under discouragement of any kind—

[r] Heb. xiii. 5.
[s] Isai. xliii. 2, 3.
[t] Gen. xxviii. 15.
[u] Jer. xlvi. 27, 28.

["Fear not, fear not, fear not." It is God's delight to "bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn;" and thrice does he renew to you the exhortation, "Fear not." Only seek to have his presence with you, and you need fear nothing. Remember the disciples in the storm. Could they sink whilst Jesus was in the vessel with them[x]? Neither can ye, under your circumstances. If God be for you, none can be effectually against you. Take him with you then, wherever you go; and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against you[y]."]

[x] Mark iv. 37—40. [y] Isai. xli. 10, 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1066

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS—OUR DUTY TO PROMOTE IT.

Jer. xxx. 17. *This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.*

CONSIDERING how much is spoken in the Holy Scriptures concerning the present and future state of the Jewish nation, it is surprising how little they occupy the attention of the Christian world. As living witnesses of the truth of our holy religion, they are indeed often mentioned; but, as having any interest in the promises of the Gospel, and as ordained to fill an exalted station in the Church of God, they are scarcely ever noticed, so that, to bring the subject before a Christian audience seems almost to require an apology; the very mention of them in that view being more calculated to excite a smile, than to call forth the more holy emotions of compassion and love. Whence this should proceed, I know not; unless from that prejudice against them, which from our earliest infancy we have imbibed, and from an idea that all efforts for their welfare are visionary and vain. But this indifference towards them is highly criminal. We are not to imagine, that, because they are under God's displeasure, we are discharged from all those duties which we owe them as men; or that, whilst God is making use of men as instruments to inflict punishment on his offending people, they are not responsible to him for the dispositions which they exercise, and the acts which they perform. Respecting the Jews in former times, it is said, "All that have

found them, have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not; because they have sinned against the Lord[a]." But was *his* anger any reason for *theirs?* Was *man* justified in despising them, because they were under the chastisement of their offended *God?* Assuredly not: for God himself complains of this very conduct; "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, with a great jealousy: and I am sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased; and they helped forward the affliction:" (and then, as in the words before my text, he adds,) "*Therefore I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies*[b]." In all that he inflicts, he himself is just: but in executing his secret purposes, *we* are not just, any more than the Jews were in crucifying their Messiah: for though they did only what "God's hand and God's counsel had determined before to be done," it was "with wicked hands that they crucified and slew him[c]." This distinction is very strongly marked in the passage before us. In the foregoing verses God vindicates his own honour, by shewing, that the Jews were themselves the authors of their own misery, in that they had brought it upon themselves by their great wickedness; yet he declares, at the same time, that the contempt poured upon them by their enemies was most offensive to him; and that when he should have fulfilled his will upon his own people, he would avenge their cause on those who, not from any zeal for his honour, but for the gratification of their own malignant passions, had been the willing, though unconscious, instruments of his vengeance[d].

That we may enter fully into this view of our text, it will be proper for me to read to you the two verses immediately preceding it: "Why criest thou for thine affliction? Thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore [the word '*therefore*' should here, as in many other parts of the prophetic writings, have been trans-

[a] Jer. l. 7.
[b] Zech. i. 14, 15.
[c] Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28.
[d] See Isai. x. 12.

lated '*nevertheless*'[e]:] Nevertheless, all that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil: and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey: for *I will restore health unto thee,* and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; *because they called thee an outcast,* saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after;" that is, 'I will take occasion, from the contempt that is poured upon thee, to manifest the regard which, even in thy lowest state, I bear towards thee, and to restore thee to my favour: *yea, the very complacency which thine enemies express in the view of thy degradation, shall call forth my indignation against them, and my compassion for thee.*'

The words thus explained, will lead us to consider *the treatment shewn to the Jewish people,* and *the light in which their conduct is viewed by Almighty God.*

I. We shall notice the treatment that is almost universally shewn to the Jewish people.

We might enter here into an historical view of the conduct of different nations towards them, and especially since their dispersion by the Romans. We might state the cruelties inflicted on them by the different potentates of Europe, not excepting those of our own country. But this would be unnecessary; since it is well known to all, that they have been, and still are, a proverb of reproach amongst ourselves, as well as in foreign lands: and that, if we wished to stigmatize any one with a name comprising every thing that was odious and contemptible, the

[e] The particle *laken,* translated *therefore,* sometimes signifies *nevertheless,* or *yet surely.* See the note on Isai. xxx. 26; and so it is translated, chap. v. 2. of this prophecy; which sense agrees best with this place, and connects this verse with the words foregoing: "*So it should be rendered likewise,* chap. xxx. 16. and xxxii. 36." See Dr. Lowth on Jer. xvi. 14. Dr. Blaney thinks it should rather be translated "*after this.*" It is obvious, that it cannot be used as an illative particle in this place. Between the other two senses the author does not undertake to determine; any further than to say, that Dr. Lowth's translation is the more agreeable to the context.

term "*Jew*" would afford us ample scope for the exercise of our malignity. Let it suffice to say, that even in this land, which, in respect of civil and religious liberty, stands unrivalled amongst the nations of the world, and where toleration is carried to its utmost extent, there has been, within the memory of many now living, as universal and disgraceful an opposition to the Jews, as could well be expected from any civilized community. When the government of this country had passed an act in their favour, such was the clamour excited throughout the whole land, not by the irreligious only, but, I am ashamed to say, the religious also, that the Parliament was constrained to repeal, in the following year, the law which had been enacted; when that law did nothing more than concede to them the common rights of humanity, the rights possessed by the meanest beggar in the land.

Nor is it in respect of civil rights only that they are so disregarded: their religious interests also are altogether overlooked. In behalf of the heathen there have been two venerable societies established in this land for above a hundred years: but who amongst us have united together for the benefit of the Jews? Within a few short months, also, has there been sent forth, from the highest authorities in the state, a circular letter[e], to call forth the exertions of every member of the community in behalf of the heathen; but on behalf of the unhappy Jews, no such effort, yea, no effort at all, has ever been made: no: they may be left to perish! "They are the Zion, whom no man seeketh after," or needs to seek after. What a striking illustration of our text is this! and how exactly corresponding with the judgment which God, by his prophet, foretold, as assuredly to come upon them in their dispersion: "I will cause them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth: and *who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest*[f]?"

But there is a point noticed in our text, to which

[e] In 1815. [f] Jer. xv. 4, 5.

I wish to draw your more particular attention. The evil which called forth the animadversion of Jehovah was, that, whilst the enemies of Zion poured contempt upon her, they vindicated their conduct in that respect, and spoke of it as being precisely such as became them on the occasion: "I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord of Hosts, because they called thee an outcast; saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after;" this is Zion, respecting whom no one needs to give himself any concern at all.

And is not this the very way in which we have conducted ourselves towards the Jewish people? We not only despise them, and disregard their welfare; but we justify this habit, and see no reason for altering it: we even feel a complacency in the thought of their degradation; and, instead of rejoicing, that now, at last, a society has arisen to seek their welfare, we regard their attempts as visionary; and are disposed rather to deride their efforts, than to afford them our active and zealous aid. Instead of praying fervently to God for this people in secret, and then going forth to exert ourselves for the conversion of their souls, we give them not so much as a place in our thoughts: and so far from being ashamed of, or even thinking it necessary to palliate, our neglect of them, I say again, we justify it; and account any frivolous excuse an ample vindication of our conduct.

On this part of our subject we shall enter more fully, in another discourse[g]: but we beg that it may be particularly kept in mind throughout this present discourse, because it is the main point on which the whole turns. Let it be remembered, that we speak not of persecuting the Jews; no, nor even of neglecting them; but we speak of *that self-vindication which we cherish in the midst of this neglect; and of the willingness which we manifest to catch at any thing, which may, with the smallest semblance of propriety, appear to justify that neglect.* Perhaps, in our whole lives, we have never once imagined that we were sinning against God by this conduct, or that he

[g] See on Zech. xiv. 7.

beheld it with any marked disapprobation; much less have we made it a ground for humiliation before God, and implored grace from Him to change and amend our ways.

Such, then, having been our conduct, let me proceed to set before you, as I proposed, under the SECOND HEAD of my discourse, the light in which it is viewed by Almighty God.

We can scarcely conceive a stronger expression of God's indignation against such conduct, than that which is contained in the passage before us; since it not only called forth his displeasure against those who were guilty of it, but induced him, in a way of recompence, to declare, that he would restore to his favour the people who were so contemned.

If, as is probable, we do not see any great evil in this conduct, let us proceed to investigate it in some different particulars.

First, mark *the inhumanity* of it. The Jews, no less than ourselves, have immortal souls, which must be partakers of happiness or misery for ever. I know, that to speak of that whole people as in a state of guilt and condemnation, is by many deemed uncharitable and severe; and I am far from censuring those whose feelings revolt from so terrible a thought. But, if we believe the Scriptures to be true, we shall find it impossible to maintain the sentiment which our charity would dictate. I presume not to say, that there may not be many individuals, both amongst Jews and Gentiles, to whom mercy may be accorded for Christ's sake, notwithstanding they have not a distinct view of his salvation: but I would ask, What did St. Paul mean, when he appealed so solemnly to the heart-searching God respecting his own feelings on account of his nation: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren's sake[h]." Would he have felt all this, if he had believed that they were in a state of salvation? Whence could

[h] Rom. ix. 1, 2.

his "great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart" arise, but from the conviction of his mind, that, whilst they continued to reject the Saviour, they were under the wrath of God? And whence arose his unabated efforts in their behalf, "that by any means he might save some," if he did not consider them all as in danger of perishing in their sins? Permit me, then, to ask, if they be indeed, nationally considered, in such a state, are we guilty of no inhumanity, whilst we use no efforts for their welfare? Were we to see a multitude of them shipwrecked, and to refuse to make exertions for their preservation, when the means of preserving them were in our hands, there would be but one sentiment in the whole world respecting our conduct; and we ourselves should be amongst the foremost to condemn those who should so violate all the feelings of humanity. Yet is not this the very conduct of which we have been guilty? We have seen that unhappy nation sinking into perdition, and *have had at our command that which is sufficient to save the whole world;* yet have we never tendered to them our assistance, nor used any means for their salvation. And in what light Almighty God views this conduct, we may judge from what he spoke respecting the Ammonites of old: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever; because they met you not with bread and with water in the way when ye came forth out of Egypt[i]." Now, if God expressed such indignation against *them* for not administering to his people temporal relief, what must he not feel against *us*, who, with the bread of life and the water of life in rich profusion in our hands, have never stirred one step to supply their wants, or to make them partakers of our benefits? The parable of the good Samaritan is familiar to us all: and there is but one sentiment amongst us respecting the conduct of the priest and the Levite towards the wounded Jew, when compared with that of the Samaritan.

[i] Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.

And are the Jews of this day less neighbours to us, than those in our Lord's day were to the Samaritans? Yet have we seen the perishing condition of that whole nation, without any suitable emotions, or any efforts made by us in their behalf. We may extenuate our fault as we will; but, in the sight both of God and man, we have been guilty of most grievous inhumanity.

Consider, next, *the injustice* of our conduct. God has given to us the Scriptures, not for ourselves only, but for the whole world also: his command to all who possess them is, (for we must not limit it to his immediate disciples,) "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature:" and so far was he from excepting the Jews, that he required a preference to be shewn to them, and particularly enjoined, that the *first* offer of salvation should be made to *them*[k]. This preference his Apostles continued to shew, till the obstinacy of the Jews constrained them to manifest towards the Gentiles an indiscriminate regard. But, if we suppose *the preference* to the Jews to be no longer enjoined, can we imagine that they are to be altogether neglected? Very different will our judgment be, if we consult what St. Paul has written on this subject: "As ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief, even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy[l]." The meaning of which passage, I conceive, is this: God withdrew his mercy from his ancient people, that he might impart it to you Gentiles; but, in imparting it to you, he never designed that it should be finally withheld from them: on the contrary, he now makes you the depositaries of his word *for their good*, that, through the mercy vouchsafed to you, they may be led to a renewed enjoyment of the blessings which they in former ages exclusively possessed. Thus have they *a claim* upon us: we are actually "*debtors* to them[m]:" and, whilst we withhold from them the blessings which are entrusted

[k] Luke xxiv. 47. [l] Rom. xi. 30, 31. [m] Rom. xv. 26, 27.

to us for their use, we are guilty of the grossest injustice. Suppose, in a time of dearth, a person of opulence should commit to his steward a sum of money for the relief of persons who were specifically described; and that, on inquiry, he should find that his steward had altogether withheld relief from those for whose benefit the trust had been committed to him, and had spent the money on himself: would any one hesitate to call him an unjust steward? What then, if, instead of improving the Gospel for the ends for which it has been committed to us, namely, that "through our mercy the Jews might obtain mercy," we have been altogether regardless of our trust, and suffered them all to "perish for lack of knowledge:" will God account us *faithful?* Will he not rather complain of us as *unjust* stewards? Will he not accuse us as having intercepted the flow of his benevolence towards the objects of his compassion, and as having robbed them of the benefits which he had ordained them to enjoy? Let us not then console ourselves with the thought, that we have never inflicted on them any positive injury; but let us rather tremble at that sentence which God has denounced against those who have hid their "talent in a napkin;" "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

There is yet another view in which I would place this conduct. Consider *the ingratitude* of it. *We* were once in as deplorable a condition as the Jews, or rather in a state far worse: for *they* do worship the one true God; whereas *we* were bowing down to stocks and stones. And how did *they* act towards *us?* The Jewish nation at large, I grant, opposed, with all their might, the calling of the Gentiles: and some who were truly pious could not see the Divine purposes in relation to this matter. But *they* acted under a mistaken sense of duty to their God; (an excuse which none of *us* can offer:) and, as soon as they were fully instructed in their duty, they accounted nothing too much to do or suffer, if they

might but be employed as instruments to "turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Most remarkable is that declaration of St. Paul, to this effect, to his Gentile converts at Philippi: "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all: for the same cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me[n]." To understand this aright, we should bear in mind, that, when burnt-offerings were presented to God under the Law, meat-offerings of flour and oil were consumed with them, and drink offerings of wine were poured out upon them[o]. "Now," says the Apostle, "I regard your faith as a sacrifice and service to the Lord: and if my blood be *poured out upon it as a libation*," (that is the meaning of the word which we translate 'offered,') "so far shall I be from complaining of my persecutors, or accounting it hard that I am called to suffer, that I shall congratulate myself, and expect to be congratulated by you, on the honour and happiness conferred upon me." Such was his love towards the Gentiles. And should there not be some measure of the same spirit in us, towards the Jews? But what self-denial have we exercised for them? or what labour have we endured for their benefit? Instead of willingly pouring out *our blood* for them, (as all the Apostles, except John, did for us,) have we even shed *a tear* for them before God, or poured out *a prayer* for their deliverance? To us they have been the greatest benefactors: all that we know of God and his Christ, we have learned from them: and all on which our hopes of eternal happiness are founded, we derive from them. Do these things call for no return at our hands? If we have received so abundantly of *their* spiritual things, is it not our "*duty*" to impart to them of *ours*[p]? When they have manifested such enlargement of heart towards us, what can we think of ourselves, if we are so straitened towards them[q]?

If any one object, that "the benefits conferred on

[n] Phil. ii. 17, 18.
[o] Numb. xv. 3—11.
[p] Rom. xv. 27.
[q] 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.

us by pious Jews of former ages lay us under no obligation to those who are ungodly in the present day," I would reply, that no one of us would argue thus in matters of mere temporal concern; but that, on the contrary, we should rather feel the claims of such persons augmented by their very necessities. Suppose, for instance, that a rich man had disinherited his own son for some offence, and conferred all his estates on us, who had no relation to him, and no claim upon him whatever; and that, in process of time, the descendants of his son were reduced to extreme want and misery; should we regard them with the same indifference as we might, perhaps, if no such circumstance had ever occurred? Should we not think they had some kind of claim upon our charity; and that, out of the wealth so undeservedly conferred on us, and in the full enjoyment of which we were living, we should do well to bestow on them at least the crumbs which fell from our table? and, if we refused them this boon, should we think, or would any person think, that gratitude "had its perfect work within us? Let us judge righteous judgment;" and let the verdict which conscience would give in that case be given in the other; only with this additional aggravation, that, whilst the charity which we refused them would in the one case have diminished our wealth, in the other it would have enlarged it, and have enriched *us* whilst it aided *them*.

There is yet one more point of view in which I will place the conduct of which I am speaking. Consider *the impiety* of it. What has not our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ done for us? He has left the bosom of his Father, and disrobed himself of all his glory, and assumed our nature (being "made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted"), and "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," and "become a curse for us, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law," and reconcile us to our offended God. And, in return for all this, what does he require at our hands? What, but that we should henceforth "live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us,

and rose again[r]?" This, methinks, is the least that we can do. To love him, to serve him, to glorify him in every possible way, is surely no more than "our reasonable service." Now, when he would instruct the Apostle Peter, how to evince his love, and how to render him the most acceptable service, what direction did he give him? "Simon, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep: feed my lambs." If it be said, that this was done for the purpose of restoring Peter to his apostolic office, which he had disgraced and forfeited, I grant it was; but still it shews, that, to administer to the spiritual and eternal welfare of the Lord's people, as far as our respective circumstances will admit of it, is a suitable expression of our love to him, and a service most acceptable in his sight. What then shall we say, if, when we have seen all his kindred according to the flesh scattered over the face of the whole earth, we have never endeavoured to bring one to his fold, or to feed them in the pastures prepared for them? May he not justly take up against us the complaint which he uttered against his shepherds of old, "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and *none did search or seek after them*[s]?" May not the reproach cast on the Christians at Rome be justly applied to us, "All men seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's[t]?" And may not the Jews themselves adopt, in reference to us, the lamentation of David, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld; but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; and *no man cared for my soul*[u]?" I readily grant, that we are not all called to the pastoral office: but are we therefore freed from all obligation to use our efforts for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, according to our ability? Do we not read of even females who "laboured in the Lord, yea, and laboured much in the Lord[x]?" There are many things which we all might have done

[r] 2 Cor. v. 15. [s] Ezek. xxxiv. 6. [t] Phil. ii. 21.
[u] Ps. cxlii. 4. [x] Rom xvi. 12.

towards the recovery of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. We might, at least, have felt towards them as the Apostle did, when he said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved[y]:" yea, like our blessed Saviour, we might have "wept" over their desolate condition[z]; and with the angel, of whom the Prophet Zechariah speaks, have pleaded for them: "O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem[a]?" But if *no measure* of this love to Christ have burned in our hearts, we may well doubt whether we have ever loved him at all, or have ever experienced his power and grace upon our own souls. If St. John's appeal respecting a backwardness to relieve the *temporal* necessities of our fellow-creatures be unanswerable, how much more will it be so, when applied to the subject before us: "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him[b]?" How indeed! We may make what profession of piety we will; but *we shall prove to demonstration, that we have no love either to God or man in our hearts, if, after this warning, we neglect to seek the welfare of the Children of Israel.*

Thus have I faithfully declared unto you what I verily believe to be the truth of God: and I appeal to yourselves, whether I have given an exaggerated statement, or whether I have declared more than you you will find to be true, if you will only seriously reflect upon it as before God. Only let it be remembered, that I have not spoken these things respecting *the mere neglect* of their welfare, but of *the justification of* that neglect, and of *the reluctance* which is shewn to make any effort for their salvation. The retrospective application of it bears upon persons only in proportion to the information they have possessed; but the prospective application comes with full weight upon the consciences of us all; so that I

[y] Rom. x. 1. [z] Luke xix. 41.
[a] Zech. i. 12. [b] 1 John iii. 17.

may say, as our Lord did to the Jews, "If we had never been addressed upon the subject, we might have had no sin: but now we shall have no cloak for our sin."

If I should attempt to trace this neglect of our Jewish Brethren to what I conceive to be its true cause, I must impute it, in a very considerable degree, to that ignorance of the prophetic writings which so generally prevails amongst us. They are not studied amongst us as they ought to be. Because they are in some parts difficult to be understood, we altogether wave the consideration of them: or, if we consider them at all, we involve them in tenfold obscurity, by interpreting, as relating to the Gentiles, what God has spoken primarily, if not exclusively, of the Jews. The truth is, that if, in reading the prophecies, we kept the Jews steadily before our eyes, such a light would shine upon the Scriptures as we have never before seen; and all the purposes and perfections of God would be unfolded to us, in a new and most interesting view. But we keep that people out of sight, and never make the prophecies relating to them a subject of our ministrations. Forgive me, if I say, that to us ministers this guilt attaches in a very high degree. Our duty has been, to "declare to our people the whole counsel of God:" and yet we have passed over this subject, as unworthy of our own attention, or of theirs: and those mysteries which caused the holy Apostle to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out[c]!" have been treated by us with contemptuous silence; our whole conduct being, in this respect, one continued comment on our text; "This is Zion, an outcast, whom no man seeketh after." I pray God, that the blood of that unhappy people may not be laid to our charge, or "be required at our hands[d]."

I cannot, however, exempt from grievous criminality the Church at large, amongst whom exists a

[c] Rom. xi. 33. [d] Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.

sad indifference even about their own souls. Too many amongst us have never truly sought salvation for themselves: how then could they seek the welfare of others? If they have never "looked on Him whom by their sins they have pierced," and never mourned for their own iniquities, how should they weep over the Jewish people, or labour to restore them to the favour of their God? Here, it is to be feared, is the root of the evil with the great mass of nominal Christians: they have not laid to heart their own wickedness: they have not wept and prayed over their own perishing condition, nor fled to Christ for refuge from the curses of the broken law. It is no wonder, then, that they have left, without any remorse, their Jewish brethren to perish in their sins. But shall we continue thus to augment our guilt; and to "treasure up for ourselves, no less than for them, wrath against the day of wrath?" In vain shall we attempt to justify this conduct: for, beyond a doubt, our God would have us like-minded with himself, when he speaks of them as still "beloved of him for their fathers' sake[e];" and with heart-felt joy contemplates their restoration to his favour. Hear how he speaks in the words following my text: "Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded on her own heap; and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof: and out of them shall proceed thanksgiving, and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, that they shall not be few; and I will glorify them, that they shall not be small .... and they shall be my people, and I will be their God[f]." Such is the delight with which *God* contemplates these great events: and shall *we* be indifferent to them? Shall we not endeavour to help forward this glorious day? Shall not their ignorance move us, and their obduracy call forth our compassion? Behold how the prophet bemoaned their situation in his day: "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction

[e] Rom. xi. 28. [f] ver. 18, 19, 22. with Jer. xxiv. 7.

of the daughter of my people: mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down upon them, and behold from heaven[g]." THIS IS THE FRAME OF MIND WHICH BECOMES US: and sure I am, that, if any measure of it be found in us, we shall neglect them no longer. We shall consider what can be done in their behalf; and shall not suffer every foolish excuse that can be offered to warp our judgment, or to paralyze our exertions. We shall bear in mind, what arrears of love we owe to them, and what a fearful responsibility hangs over us before God: and we shall lend ourselves to every good work, whereby their minds may be enlightened, and their souls "subdued to the obedience of faith." We shall not account it superfluous to exert ourselves, because we do not expect "the nation to be born in a day;" but shall gladly labour, in every possible way, for the promotion of their good, "*if by any means we may save* SOME." If we may but gain "one of a city, and two of a tribe or family[h];" yea, if after all our efforts, we may but glean a small remnant, four or five from the top of the outermost branches of the olive-tree[i], we shall account our exertions richly recompensed, and shall bless our God that we "have not laboured in vain, or run in vain."

[g] Lam. iii. 48—50. [h] Jer. iii. 14. [i] Isai. xvii. 6.

OUTLINE NO. 1067

GOD'S REGARD FOR THOSE WHO APPROACH UNTO HIM.

Jer. xxx. 21. *Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.*

THE history of the Jews is deserving of attention, not merely as unfolding to our view the gradual introduction of Christianity, but as shadowing forth all the most important parts of the Christian system. The passage before us primarily relates to the return of the Jews from Babylon. It foretells, that a terrible destruction should come upon their oppressors:

that they, in consequence of it, should be restored to their own country, and live under governors of their own nation, and have the same access to God, in his worship, as they had enjoyed before the destruction of their city and temple. But, under these events, many others of a more sublime nature were typified. Their governors represented Christ, who should in due time arise to reign over them; and their enjoyment of Divine ordinances depicted the privileges which we were to possess under the Christian dispensation. To evince this, we will shew,

I. To whom this passage refers—

Besides referring to Zerubbabel and the Jewish people, it refers,

1. To Christ—

[Beyond all doubt he was the Governor who was to arise from among that people[a], and to reign over the house of David for ever[b]— — — He "approached unto God" as our Surety and High Priest on earth, and as our Advocate and Intercessor in heaven — — — In this glorious work he "engaged his heart." When first he entered into covenant with the Father respecting it, he shewed that his whole heart was engaged in it[c]: and, from the moment that he entered upon his work, he persisted in it, notwithstanding all which he had to endure in the prosecution of it[d]— — —]

2. To his people—

[His followers are characterized as "a people near unto God[e]:" and to them, as the words following the text evince, the words before us may be applied. They endeavour to "approach God" in the way that he has appointed: they "draw near to him with a true heart, in full assurance of

[a] Compare ver. 9. with Ps. xxii. 28. and Matt. ii. 6.

[b] Luke i. 32, 33, 68—75. where the whole subject of the chapter before us is represented as verified in Christ.

[c] Ps. xl. 7, 8.

[d] See while yet a child, Luke ii. 46—49. And during his ministry, he went into the wilderness that he might be tempted, Matt. iv. 1.—he rebuked Peter for dissuading him from suffering, Matt. xvi. 22, 23.—he longed for his bloody baptism, Luke xii. 50.—he resigned himself to suffer all that was necessary, John xii. 27, 28.—nor would he rescue himself (John xviii. 6—9.), or be rescued (Matt. xxvi. 51—54.), or come down from the cross, till he could say, "It is finished," Matt. xxvii. 42.

[e] Ps. cxlviii. 14.

faith." They approach him in the public ordinances and in their private chambers. They "have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus:" they come even to the throne of God: they "stir up themselves to lay hold on him," and "will not let him go, until he bless them." In this work they "engage their hearts:" they know that "the drawing nigh to God with their lips only is a vain service:" they therefore labour to "worship him in spirit," and to say with David, "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed." Whatever discouragements arise, they know that to yield to them must be productive of the most fatal consequences: and therefore they determine, if they are tempted at any time to say "I am cast out of the sight of thine eyes," they will not despair; but will "cry unto God from the very belly of hell[f]," assured that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."]

But to understand the passage aright, we must notice,

II. The peculiar force of the interrogation—

It is not to be supposed that God asks for information: the inquiry is rather expressive of his most cordial approbation.

God delighted in the mediation of his dear Son—

[In the prospect of this event, the Father delighted in him before man had fallen, or the world itself was formed[g]. And he commanded his prophet to announce, that he was "well pleased for his righteousness' sake[h]," not only before he had wrought out that righteousness, but hundreds of years before he became incarnate. No sooner did the Lord Jesus enter on his work, than the Father, by an audible voice from heaven, attested that he was "well pleased with him." The same testimony he bore, and in the same manner, on two other occasions: and in all his other dispensations towards him, he evinced that Jesus was "his elect, in whom his soul delighted[i]." If at any time that approbation could be supposed to be withheld, it would be while the Father hid his face from him on the cross, or smote him with the sword of justice: but in reference to that very period we are told, that "it pleased the Father to bruise him[k];" and that "the sacrifice then offered was of a sweet-smelling savour[l]."

[f] Jonah ii. 2, 4.
[g] Prov. viii. 22, 23, 30.
[h] Isai. xlii. 21.
[i] Isai. xlii. 1.
[k] Isai. liii. 10. This passage marks the pleasure which God took, not indeed in inflicting punishment on his Son, but in making him a substitute for sinful man.
[l] Eph. v. 2.

He delights also in the approaches of a sinner to his footstool—

["The prayer of the upright is his delight." If in heaven "there is joy among the angels in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth," doubtless that God, in whose presence they are, approves and participates their joy. The representation given of him in the parable of the Prodigal Son, both countenances and confirms this sentiment; yea, to such a degree is he pleased with the supplications of a repenting sinner, that he would rather withdraw his eyes from every other object, whether in heaven or on earth, than not direct them especially towards him[m]. See this exemplified in Saul of Tarsus: no sooner had that blood-thirsty persecutor begun to humble himself before his Maker, than God sent a special messenger to his relief, assigning this as the reason, "Behold, he prayeth[n]!" Thus at this time, if he see any of his rebellious creatures prostrating themselves before him, and earnestly imploring mercy, he will say, '*Who is this?* Is this the creature that I beheld so recently in arms against me? Is this he who seemed to hurl defiance in my face? is it he, who now so humbly engages his heart to approach unto me? He is my dear son; he is a pleasant child: my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him for evermore[o].']

APPLICATION—

[Are there any amongst you that can answer to the inquiry, 'Lord, it is I: I find my need of thee: I have engaged my heart in thy service; and am determined, through thy grace, that I will never go back?' Let me congratulate you, my brethren: for "blessed is the man whom God chooses, and causes to approach unto him[p]." Be thoroughly in earnest, and take care that you do not, after putting your hand to the plough, look back again.

Are there any who are constrained to say, 'I would gladly make such a reply; but my rebellious heart revolts, and will not obey the dictates of my judgment?' Then I would bid them to mark the works before the text; "I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me." If any go unto him, it is not owing to their own superior goodness or strength, but to the attractive influences of God's Spirit. Adopt then the petition of the Church of old, and then you may with confidence adopt her engagement also, "Draw me, and we will run after thee[q]:" "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart[r]."]

[m] Isai. lxvi. 2.
[n] Acts ix. 10, 11.
[o] Jer. xxxi. 18—20.
[p] Ps. lxv. 4.
[q] Cant. i. 4.
[r] Ps. cxix. 32

OUTLINE NO. 1068

GRACIOUS INFLUENCES THE FRUIT OF ELECTING LOVE.

Jer. xxxi. 3. *The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*

THERE is a most glorious connexion subsisting between the Lord and his people: He is their God, even "the God of all the families of Israel;" and they are his people, devoted altogether to his service. He is the God of every individual, as much as if no other object of his love existed in the whole creation besides; and they are his exclusively, and without reserve. But here two questions arise: How are they brought into this connexion with him? and, From whence does this exalted privilege arise? Our text enables us to answer these questions; and we will answer them in their order.

I. How are God's people brought into this glorious connexion with him?

Our text informs us, that we are "drawn" to it by the Father himself. We shall therefore answer this first question by shewing,

1. How he draws them—

[The term "drawing" is supposed to import somewhat of a force that is inconsistent with the free agency of man: and, were that idea just, we should be found among the first that would oppose such a doctrine as unscriptural and absurd. But the drawings of God's Spirit do not in the least interfere with the liberty of human actions. The drawing of which our text speaks, is "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[a]:" it is through the medium of the understanding, the will, and the affections; the understanding, as enlightened with divine truth; the will, as determined by sound judgment; and the affections, as engaged by the excellence of those things which the will is bent to follow. True it is, that we cannot precisely declare the manner in which the operations of the Holy Spirit influence the soul; for we do not even know how our own spirit acts upon the body: but we know infallibly, that God does influence the minds of men; not however by

[a] Hos. xi. 4.

making them to act contrary to their will, but by making them "willing in the day of his power[b]."]

2. That their connexion with him is altogether owing to his influence—

[If the most express declarations of Scripture can determine any thing, the point in hand is established beyond a doubt: for our blessed Lord says, that "no man," whatever his quality or talents, "can come to him," in the exercise of true faith, "unless the Father draw him[c]." This testimony is decisive. But the truth of the point established by it is no less clear, from the representation which the Scriptures give us of the work which is wrought on the minds of all who are truly brought to God. It is called "a creation[d]," which we all know to be the work of God; and a resurrection from the dead, which is equally beyond any finite power to effect[e]. Whatever may be supposed to have effected the good work within us, it is expressly excluded, that God may have all the glory[f]. If it be said, that such difficulties exist only in more abandoned characters, we answer, that the Apostles themselves put themselves, in this respect, on a level with the vilest of mankind[g]: and thereby fully confirm the testimony of our Lord above cited.]

The next question that arises is,

II. To what must this exalted mercy be traced?

Is it any peculiar fitness in this or that man, which occasions God to single *him* out as an object to be drawn by him; or is the mercy vouchsafed by God to whomsoever he will, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure? We cannot hesitate to declare, that the whole salvation, from first to last, is purely of grace.

[St. Paul himself was constrained to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am:" and, of course, every one else must do the same. But we cannot but have observed, on many occasions, how indignantly the natural man revolts from this doctrine. We do not doubt the sovereignty of God in rescuing man from destruction rather than the fallen angels; or in making the Jews his peculiar people, in preference to all others upon earth; or in selecting Isaac and Jacob whilst he rejected Ishmael and Esau: nor can we doubt that we ourselves, as

[b] Ps. cx. 3. [c] John vi. 44. [d] Eph. ii. 10.
[e] Eph. ii. 1. with i. 19, 20. [f] John i. 13. Rom. xi. 16.
[g] Eph. ii. 3—5. Tit. iii. 3—6.

enjoying the light of revelation, are objects of his sovereign choice, when we see far the greater part of mankind involved in midnight darkness: and yet we cannot endure the doctrine, when applied to the more immediate communication of God's mercy to our souls. But to God's everlasting love is our salvation ascribed in our text; and to that alone can it with truth or propriety ever be ascribed: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; *therefore* with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."]

Now this is the plain doctrine of Scripture—

[God does not love us because we first loved him; but "we love him because he first loved us[h]." It was thus also with the Apostles themselves: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain[i]." To us the terms, Election and Predestination, almost sound like blasphemy: but the Apostles did not view them in this light: they considered every blessing we enjoy as the fruit of God's electing love, and of his sovereign will predestinating us from all eternity to the enjoyment of it[k]——They are particularly careful to exclude all works of ours from forming a ground of God's electing love, lest we should boast as having in some degree merited his favour[l]. The whole tenour of the Scriptures shews, that "God hath compassion on whom he will have compassion[m];" and that his people are "a remnant according to the election of grace[n]."]

And in relation to this subject God is peculiarly jealous—

[How strongly did he guard his people of old against imagining that his distinguishing favour to them was founded in any superior goodness of theirs[o]! In like manner he puts it to us; "Who made thee to differ? and What hast thou which thou hast not received? and, If thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it[p]?" The whole of his Gospel is purposely designed to cut off all ground of glorying from man, that God alone may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ[q].]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who cannot receive this doctrine—

[Would it not be well to search and examine what is the real foundation of your objections to it? Nothing can be more

[h] 1 John iv. 19. [i] John xv. 16.
[k] See Eph. i. 3—6. and 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. [l] 2 Tim. i. 9.
[m] Rom. ix. 15. [n] Rom. xi. 5. [o] Deut. vii. 7, 8.
[p] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [q] Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 1 Cor. i. 28, 29

clear, than that the doctrine of Divine influences pervades the Holy Scriptures, and that these influences are constantly represented as imparted to men according to God's sovereign will and pleasure: yet the generality of men reject those doctrines merely because they cannot explain all the difficulties involved in them. But does the denial of these doctrines involve no difficulties? Yes indeed, and incomparably greater: nor is there a single doctrine, even of natural religion, and much more of that which is revealed, that has not some difficulty attached to it. But the truth is, that our proud hearts do not like to be so stripped of all goodness, or to be made so entirely dependent on God. Here is the root of the whole controversy: and, when once the soul is humbled in the dust before God, we shall readily receive God's declarations without gainsaying, and thankfully accept his mercy as a free unmerited gift.

But it is not wise for persons who are mere novices in religion to be disputing about abstract doctrines: it were better far to seek after God according to the light they have. All must acknowledge, that they ought to take God as their God, and to give themselves to him as his people. Let me then urge you to do this with your whole hearts: and we have no fear but that, if once you be enabled to do this, you will say, "Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be the praise."]

2. To those who profess to have the experience of it in their own souls—

[Have you been "drawn" by divine grace? and have you a good hope that you are of the number of God's elect? Then remember for what end he has drawn you, and for what end he has chosen you: it has been to make you "a holy and a peculiar people to himself." Has he chosen you? it is "*that you should be holy*[r]." Has he predestinated you? it is "*to be conformed to the image of his Son*[s]." Has he created you anew? it is "*unto good works, which God hath before ordained that you should walk in them*[t]." Hence God makes the consideration of his electing love a motive and a reason for following after holiness of heart and life: "The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them; and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise *therefore* the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked[u]." O, beg of him that you may be enabled thus to improve the blessings he has conferred upon you. This will best "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," who

[r] Eph. i. 4.
[s] Rom. viii. 29.
[t] Eph. ii. 10.
[u] Deut. x. 15, 16.

imagine that the doctrines of grace are subversive of morality, and that the honour which you give to God is only a cloak for idleness and sin. For this end alone are the drawings of God's Spirit desirable, namely, to make you more holy, more spiritual, more heavenly than any person without those influences can be. Say then, with the Church of old, "Draw me, and I will run after thee[x];" and prove, by the steadiness of your heavenly course, that you do not pray in vain, and that God does not bestow upon you his grace in vain.]

3. To those who desire to embrace and feel it—

[Many there are who wish to submit to the revealed will of God, and yet never can contemplate his sovereignty without a fear and dread arising in their souls: but this is occasioned by their looking only on the dark side of the question, and thinking what must become of them if they are not elect: they contemplate sovereignty in connexion only with justice, and not in connexion with love and mercy. If they turned their thoughts more to his everlasting *love*, they would soon feel its attractive and constraining influence. We do not say that terror is not often made use of by God to awaken men; but it is by "*loving-kindness* that he draws" them into sweet communion with himself. Think then *generally* of his love *to man*, in providing redemption for him when he had passed by the fallen angels without any such gracious provision for their restoration to his favour: from thence proceed to think more particularly of his love *to you*, in having sent you the tidings of his salvation, and in having given you a desire to possess an interest in it: and you will then soon find a sweet confidence springing up in your souls: you will look to him as a Father; you will regard him as a Friend; you will feel encouragement to cast yourselves upon him, and pleasure in giving up yourselves to his service. Seek only to know how much he has loved you, and you will soon be constrained to love him, and to delight yourselves in him.]

[x] Cant. i. 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1069

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Jer. xxxi. 7—9. *Thus saith the Lord; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplica-*

tions will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.

IT was expressly commanded by God, that all the males belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel should go up thrice every year to worship the Lord at Jerusalem. If we paint to ourselves the concourse which this would occasion at the appointed seasons, we may form some conception of what shall take place, in due season, from every quarter of the world. If it be said, that the land of Israel will be too small to hold the numbers that, in that case, would be assembled; I answer, that this very circumstance is adverted to in prophecy, where it is said, "The land shall be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants; so that they shall say, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell[a]." That the Jews shall be restored to their own land, is, I think, as plainly declared in Scripture, as any truth in the Bible: though, if any be disposed to doubt it, I am not anxious to maintain a controversy respecting it; because, however important it may be to *the Jews*, it is to *us* a matter of small moment. To me it appears, that the preceding chapter, together with that before us, is fully upon this point. But, at all events, the future conversion of the Jews is absolutely certain, and indeed is universally admitted: and the multitudes of converts to the Christian Church in that day will be a visible accomplishment of the words preceding my text, which say, that "the watchmen on the Mount Ephraim will cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God!"

In reference to the restoration of the Jews, we have in our text,

I. A command to us—

The Most High God is he that speaks to us in this place; and he enjoins us here,

1. To take an interest in the welfare of his people—

[a] Isai. xlix. 19, 20.

[It is a great reproach to the Christian world, that, from the close of the apostolic age, they have shewn very little attention to the Jews. Indeed, they have overlooked the prophecies relating to them; and thought little more, either of God's interest in them, or theirs in him, than if not a word had been spoken respecting them in Scripture. But God says to us, "Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations." Here it is evident that we ought so to keep in view God's gracious designs respecting them, as to have our hearts filled with joy in the contemplation of the blessings that await them. This is enjoined in other passages of Holy Writ[b] ——— and I again say, that we have exceeding great reason to be humbled, when we look back on our past indifference towards them ———]

2. To express that interest in every suitable way—

[We should *give to them the benefit*, and *to God the honour*, of what the Scripture has revealed concerning them; "publishing it" wheresoever we go, whether to Jews or Gentiles; and "praising God for it," as a stupendous display of his glorious perfections ——— And whilst we endeavour to engage their attention to these things, we must, by fervent intercession, endeavour to engage God also in their behalf. We should, together with our public efforts, exert ourselves in secret also, saying, "O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel." This is especially commanded: we are even enjoined so to abound in importunity, as "not to give any rest to God till he arises to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth[c]." Alas! how shamefully negligent have we all been in this duty! We know how fervently Moses interceded for them on many occasions; and even prayed to have "his own name blotted out of the book of God's remembrance," rather than that they should be subjected to God's heavy displeasure. Let us seek to attain somewhat of the same spirit; and "labour fervently for them night and day in prayer," that they may be restored to the favour and the image of their God ———]

Verily our labour should not be in vain; since to this command, without the intervention of a single word, God adds,

II. A promise to them—

In the promise here given, you observe,

1. Their restoration to God—

[God himself will, in due season, interpose for their recovery. *However distant* they are from him, he can, and will,

[b] Isai. xliv. 23. and lxvi. 10—12. [c] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

bring them home to himself — — — and, however *discouraging their circumstances*, will work effectually for them. View them when they came out of Egypt: nothing could exceed their weakness: yet he brought them out safely, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. So now, though they be blind, and lame, and in a state either of pregnancy or actual travail, he will crown their efforts with success; yea, and as in that day, so at the time appointed, a great company shall return thither." Whatever "mountains be in the way, before Zerubbabel they shall become a plain[d]" — — —]

2. The manner in which it shall be effected—

["With weeping and supplication shall they come;" as says the Prophet Zechariah also, "God will pour out upon them a spirit of grace and of supplication: and they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one is in bitterness for his first-born[e]." In the whole of their progress they shall be carried forward with an abundance of peace, and joy, and holiness: for God will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble." The wonders transacted in the wilderness shall, in a spiritual way at least, be realized again: for God will guide them by his counsel, and strengthen them by his grace, and comfort them with the consolations of his Spirit, till he bring them in safety to his glory — — —]

3. The pledge that it shall surely be accomplished—

[When Moses urged Pharaoh to liberate that people, he particularly enforced his request with this consideration, that they were "God's first-born[f]." And in that light he still regards them, though he has cast them off for a season. To them, therefore, will he again reveal himself as a father; and for them will he again interpose as "his first-born," whom nothing shall induce him finally to disinherit. As he has sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so has he sworn that he will not be wrath with them, nor rebuke them; and that, though the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, his kindness shall not depart from them, nor the covenant of his peace be removed from them[g]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Look well to it that you are yourselves restored to God—

[You have the same need of it as the Jews — — — and must return in the same way — — — Inquire, I pray you,

[d] See Isai. xlix. 9—11.
[e] Zech. xii. 10.
[f] Exod. iv. 12.
[g] ver. 37. with Isai. liv. 9, 10.

whether you have come to the Lord Jesus with weeping and supplication" — — — and are walking steadily and uniformly in his holy ways — — — This is as necessary for your salvation, as for theirs — — —]

2. Endeavour to help forward the restoration of your Jewish Brethren—

[You have seen that God enjoins you to interest yourselves in their behalf, exerting yourselves *with God for them*, and *with them for God*. To *intercede* for them *in secret*, is your bounden duty, and to *labour* for them in *public* — — — What you cannot do by your own personal efforts, you may accomplish through the Society which solicits your aid — — — — — —]

OUTLINE NO. 1070

THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS.

Jer. xxxi. 8, 9. *Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.**

THE language in which the prophets speak of the return of the Jews from Babylon, necessitates us to look to some other event for the full accomplishment of their predictions. In a measure, they were fulfilled in the conversion of so many myriads to God in the apostolic age: but they will receive their final completion in the Millennial period, when all flesh shall see the salvation of God. In speaking of those whom God would bring back from their captivity, and by whom he would re-establish his worship upon Mount Zion, the prophet has respect to those who should come out from their earthly bondage to serve God in the Church of Christ. He here gives us a highly figurative description of,

I. Their character—

* In the foregoing Discourse this passage is treated more particularly in reference to *the Jews*: in this, as applicable to the Church at large.

If we should select those who were of all others most incapable of undertaking a journey of many hundred miles through a trackless desert, we should certainly fix on those mentioned in the text: yet those are the persons specified by God as chosen by him for that very purpose. We cannot doubt but that something peculiarly important is intended to be conveyed under this striking representation. It implies then, we apprehend,

1. That there are no discouragements which God will not enable us to surmount—

[Persons, when exhorted to begin their journey heavenward, are ready to urge the peculiarity of their situation and circumstances, either *as an excuse for their not attempting the work*, or *as a reason for procrastination*. But however specious their pleas may be (and certainly none can appear stronger than those which the persons referred to in the text might offer), God would have them to know, that, under his auspices, the feeblest person in the universe may undertake the hardest services, assured that "through Christ strengthening him he shall be able to do all things[a]." "The blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness[b];" "the lame man shall leap as an hart[c];" "the travailing woman shall be delivered without pain" or consequent weakness[d]; the very dead shall arise out of their graves, to perform the functions of life[e]; nor shall any thing be impossible to them that believe[f].

Let none then excuse themselves on account of ignorance or weakness, or wait for a more convenient season; but rather let all with one heart obey the call of God, and go forth "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." As on the departure of Israel from Egypt "there was not one feeble person among their tribes[g]," so neither shall there be one at this time whose "strength shall not be according to his day[h]."]

2. That God has chosen those who are in the most discouraging circumstances, on purpose that his own power may be the more displayed and glorified—

[If none but the strong and active were to enter on the Christian course, or none but the moral and the wise were to embrace the truth, we should be ready to ascribe the glory to man. But God has reserved all the glory to himself, by taking

[a] Phil. iv. 13. [b] Isai. xxix. 18. [c] Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.
[d] Isai. lxvi. 7—9. [e] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—12. [f] Mark ix. 23.
[g] Ps. cv. 37. [h] Deut. xxxiii. 25.

the poor and ignorant and vile in preference to others[i], and by converting them to himself through the instrumentality of the weakest means[k]. Apparent discouragements therefore may rather operate to increase our expectations of more effectual aid; since the weaker we are in ourselves, the more will Christ's strength be perfected in our weakness[l]. Instead of pleading our unfitness and imbecility as reasons for declining the path of duty, we should rather glory in our unfitness, "that the power of Christ may rest upon us[m]."]

Curious as the description of the persons is, it is not more so than the representation of,

II. Their journey—

Many there have been, and infinitely more shall there hereafter be, even "a multitude that no man can number," who shall be brought to Zion. But how shall they come? Their journey is here described,

1. In its commencement—

"Weeping and supplication" well become those who are "turning from the power of Satan unto God." How can they reflect on their former bondage without the deepest humiliation, or without crying mightily to God for pardon and deliverance? How can they stir one step towards Zion, and not be overwhelmed with admiring and adoring thoughts of God's goodness to them, and entreating that the good work which he has begun may be carried on and perfected in their souls? The more ardent their desire is after God, the more will weeping and prayer abound in their experience[n].]

2. In its progress—

[As the journey from Babylon to Judea was both wearisome and dangerous, especially for persons circumstanced as the Jews were in their return to Zion, so the Christian's path lies through many difficulties and dangers. But God promises him the things he so much needs; *refreshing consolation*, and *unerring direction*.

There are times when the "souls of God's people are discouraged by reason of the way[o]." Their trials and temptations overwhelm their spirit; and they would "utterly fail," if not succoured by seasonable communications of grace and peace. But God has provided a Comforter for them, even the Holy Ghost, whom he will send into their drooping and desponding souls, and by whose agency he will revive and strengthen

[i] 1 Cor. i. 26—29. [k] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [l] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[m] 2 Cor. xii. 10. [n] Zech. xii. 10. with Jer. l. 4, 5.
[o] Numb. xxi. 4. Ps. cvii. 4, 5.

them[p]. None can be in so distressed a state, but they shall have "rivers" of consolation at hand for their refreshment[q].

Is their path peculiarly intricate and slippery? God will "make their way plain before their face:" "the rough places shall be plain, and the crooked paths straight." In seasons of difficulty "they shall hear a voice behind them saying, This is the way, walk ye in it[r]." And if at any time their foot slide, he will put "his everlasting arms underneath them," and uphold them that they may not fall.

Of these seasonable communications the Christian may be assured, because of the near relation in which he stands to God himself. "God is his father, and considers him as his first-born[s]." Whatever therefore is suited to that high relation shall certainly be imparted to him, in such a measure, and such a manner, as shall most conduce to his eternal welfare.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet in a state of bondage—

[Whatever diversity there may be in the states and characters of those who return to Zion, there is not one who does not see abundant reason to class himself among those mentioned in the text: and if we have never felt ourselves in a state resembling theirs, we may be assured that we are yet in bondage to sin and Satan. Behold then, to such persons we have a message from God himself: as God's "watchmen, we would cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God[t]!" Make no excuses, no delays. The Lord Jesus Christ has "proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Be not then like those in Babylon, who, because of their comfortable settlements there, sat down regardless of the Holy Land; but put yourselves under the guidance of your Divine Leader; brave the dangers and difficulties of the way; and look to the honour and felicity of serving him, as an ample recompence for all that you can do or suffer in the ways of his appointment.]

2. Those who are travelling towards Zion—

[Adored be God, who "has brought you out with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm!" But beware how you ever think of returning to your former bondage: for "then will your last end be worse than your beginning[u]." You must expect difficulties: your faith and patience will be tried: it is "through faith and patience that you must inherit the promises[x]." But, when God is for you, you need not care who,

p Isai. xliii. 19, 20. and xl. 29—31.
q Isai. xli. 17, 18.
r Isai. xxx. 21. and xxxv. 8.
s Exod. iv. 22, 23.
t ver. 6.
u 2 Pet. ii. 20.
x Heb. vi. 12.

or what, is against you. Only "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God:" "in the mount of difficulty the Lord will be seen[y]:" though you are no better armed than Gideon's band with their lamps and pitchers, you shall put to flight all that oppose your progress[z]: and though you are as unfit for exertion as a travailing woman, you shall reach in safety the Zion that is above.]

[y] Gen. xxii. 14. [z] Judg. vii. 20, 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1071

THE PREACHED GOSPEL A SOURCE OF BLESSINGS TO THE WORLD.

Jer. xxxi. 10—14. *Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their souls shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord.*

THERE is a beauty and richness in the inspired volume which is not to be found in any human composition: and we cannot but consider it as a very serious injury to the Church, that the habit of expounding Scripture, which was so prevalent amongst the Reformers, is now almost wholly laid aside. Though we may speak many good things from a detached portion of Scripture, yet we never can give so great weight to any passage by our own comments, as it receives from its own context: and the more entirely God himself is permitted to speak, provided there be unity in the subject, the better. Take the passage which we have just read: it is capable of being made the ground-work of many discourses; but the force and interest which it derives from being

considered in one connected view, would be lost. It is an exceedingly beautiful portion of Holy Writ; in elucidating which I shall be led to set before you,

I. The event which we are here commanded to proclaim—

You perceive that all "the nations" of the earth, are called upon to "*hear*" *from God*, and to "proclaim," as from God, to the remotest islands of the sea, and say, "He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock." This, beyond all doubt, refers, in the first instance, to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon. But it did not by any means receive its full accomplishment in that; since instead of their "not sorrowing any more at all," their sorrows have, by means of their dispersion by the Romans, been multiplied beyond measure, and at times almost beyond endurance. But there is a time coming, and it is now very near at hand, when God will redeem them from all their enemies, and restore them to the full possession of their own land. And a blessed event will that be! Consider,

1. The manner in which it shall be accomplished—

[You well know how a river, with ten thousand tributary streams, flows into the ocean. But to see it flow up a mountain would fill you with utter astonishment. Yet thus it is that God's ancient people will "flow unto the height of Zion." "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains; and God's Israel, contrary to the course of nature, shall flow unto it," coming, as it were, from every quarter of the globe[a], in one simultaneous movement, to worship the Lord in Jerusalem, just as all the males in Israel were wont to do at the three great and stated feasts.]

2. The object which all will have in view—

["They will flow together for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd." Beyond all doubt they will be blessed at that time with great *temporal* prosperity, perhaps greater than was ever enjoyed even in the days of Solomon. But under the image of *temporal* benefits, no doubt *spiritual* blessings are principally designed. Indeed, it must be remembered, that the things here mentioned were

[a] Isai. ii. 2.

in fact, the chief articles which were presented unto God in sacrifice; and consequently they designate those services which conduced at the same time to the honour of God, and to the refreshment of man. Under these are comprehended the word and ordinances of Jehovah, and especially those great and precious promises of his which minister strength and comfort to all his waiting people. To have communion with God in his worship, and to derive from him all the blessings of salvation, will doubtless be the chief objects of desire amongst all the people who shall assemble at Jerusalem. And by this will they obtain a most abundant communication of spiritual blessings to their souls, insomuch that, from having hitherto resembled only a desolate wilderness, they will become, in all the fruits of righteousness, "like a well watered garden;" and will from that time "dismiss all the sorrows" with which for so many centuries they have been oppressed. This shews, that the prophecy before us has not ever yet been fulfilled but in a very slight and partial manner; and that its full accomplishment yet waits for the arrival of the Millennial age.]

3. The effect which will be produced—

[Unutterable will be the joy that will then pervade the whole nation: "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and make them rejoice from their sorrow." In *that* all ranks and orders of men will unite; the priests and the people vying with each other in the expressions of their joy.

But here also it is evident that this was to take place under the Christian dispensation. The sacrifices which were offered under the law, were for the support of *the priests only*, with *their families:* nor was *the fat* to be eaten even by them: *That* must on all occasions be consumed upon the altar: whereas at the time to which this prophecy refers, "the priests shall satiate their souls with *fatness*," and all the people indiscriminately, together with the priests, (being all of them a royal priesthood,) shall "be satisfied with the goodness of the Lord[b]." Other things, to whatever extent they may be enjoyed, are empty and unsatisfying: but those who attain these things shall be so *satisfied*," as never to thirst after any thing else[c]. Who can conceive the full import of expressions like these? ———]

II. The interest we have in it—

An especial command is issued to the whole Gentile world, both to consider, and to proclaim this glad event. It is our duty to contemplate it,

[b] Compare 1 Sam. ii. 15—17. with Isai. lv. 2. [c] John vi. 35

1. As it respects the Jews—

[The Christian world has been strangely inattentive to their duty in this respect, from the apostolic age even to the times in which we live. In reference to the heathen world, some little interest has been felt: but the Jewish nation has been almost wholly overlooked; and the promises of God in his word which have referred to their restoration to his favour, have been applied almost wholly to the Gentiles. I cannot but mention in particular the 60th chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, which, if read in connexion with the two closing verses of the preceding chapter, one would have supposed must have filled the minds of all with an eager expectation of the benefits which await the Jews; but which has been interpreted as referring almost exclusively to the Gentiles: yes, and even the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans has interested us as little in behalf of the Jews, as if, instead of conveying truths as clear and full as language could express them, it had contained nothing but a mass of unintelligible jargon. Brethren, we are highly criminal in this matter. Why has God so strongly called our attention to this subject, and constituted us his heralds to proclaim it; but to call forth our desire after this blessed period, and our efforts to help it forward? Shall it be said that the accomplishment of these events must be left to God? I grant that none but God can accomplish them. But neither can any power less than his effect the conversion of the Gentiles. Yet was this any reason why men should not exert themselves to promote it? Did "Paul forbear to plant, or Apollos to water, because God alone could give the increase?" No: we are to be "workers together with God," even as the Apostles were. The souls of God's ancient people should be as dear to us, as the souls of the idolatrous Gentiles were to the Apostles: and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, whether amongst Jews or Gentiles, should call forth our utmost efforts, in a dependence upon God for his promised blessing.

I call upon you then, in the very name and with the authority of God himself, to unite, every one of you in his sphere, according to your respective abilities, to help forward this great and glorious event.]

2. As it respects ourselves—

[Though in its primary meaning this passage refers to the Jews, the whole tenour of it shews that it belongs to us under the Christian dispensation. (The mourning of Rachel for her children, mentioned in the words following my text, was fulfilled in the slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem.) To us is promised, no less than to God's ancient people, a transition from bondage to liberty, from sin to holiness, from sorrow to joy. *We* are wandering from the fold of God, and need to be

"gathered, and kept by the Good Shepherd," even by him who "ransomed us" with a price, and "laid down his life for the sheep" — — — We too, in coming to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, may expect a full enjoyment of all the same benefits; all of us, as "a royal priesthood," being partakers of God's altar, and living upon the sacrifice there offered — — — Absurd and impious beyond measure are the modes adopted amongst us for expressing our joy at the glad tidings of redemption: (carnal feastings and dances are very ill suited to express the feelings of a soul redeemed by *the incarnation* and death of the Son of God:) but to "delight our souls in fatness," and to "satiate ourselves with the goodness of the Lord," is the employment which I would commend to every one of you to the latest hour of your lives — — —]

On a review of this subject we are naturally led to

INQUIRE,

1. Whence is it that the Gospel produces so little effect in the present day?

[The glad tidings of redemption through the blood of Christ are *professedly* proclaimed by all who have entered into the ministerial office: yet in many places no change whatever is wrought in the manners and habits of the people. What can be the reason of this? Has the Gospel lost its power? No: but there is some essential defect in the ministration of it: in many places the doctrine of the cross is not made sufficiently prominent; yea, in some, it is kept almost out of sight; and no other use is made of the atonement and righteousness of Christ than to supply the defects of man's obedience. And where Christ is more fully preached, he is often represented as purchasing only a pardon for our past sins, and then as leaving us to "maintain our warfare at our own cost," and work out our salvation by our own arm: whereas the Scripture speaks of him as not only redeeming his people, but "gathering them" by his own care, and "keeping them" by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation[d]. Now a mutilated Gospel is in reality no Gospel: salvation must be preached as altogether of grace through faith: the whole glory of it belongs to God: nor will he ever honour any ministry that robs him of it.

But even where the Gospel is most faithfully preached, it produces, in comparison of the apostolic age, but little effect. The reason of this we apprehend to be, that our hearers, being Christians *in name*, and educated in *a profession* of Christian doctrines, are ready to imagine that they are Christians *in deed*, and that they have *a saving acquaintance* with the Gospel: they are, like the Laodiceans of old, "rich and increased with

[d] 1 Pet. i. 5.

goods, and have need of nothing" in their own estimation, and unconscious that "they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[e]:" and whilst they continue so unconscious of their need of a Redeemer, it is not to be wondered at that they are so little affected with the tidings of redemption. O remember, that a "ransom" implies captivity, and "redemption" bondage: and beg of God to shew you what slaves you have been to sin and Satan, in order that you may appreciate as you ought the Gospel of Christ. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:" and till you feel your disorder, you will despise the remedy.]

2. What is to be done in order to render it more effectual?

[In hearing the ministers of Christ, we do not sufficiently bear in mind *whose* word it is that they preach unto us, or the deep interest we have in it: we rather consider them as performing an official duty when they deliver a discourse, and ourselves as having performed our duty when we have heard it. But we must have far other views of the Gospel than these: we must consider the word we hear, as *God's* word, and as God's word *to ourselves in particular*. We must consider God as looking down with pity upon us in our destitute condition, and saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; for I have found a ransom." We must regard him as longing for our happiness, and seeking to fill us with his richest consolations. In a word, we must view the Gospel as Jeremiah did the ropes and other materials which Ebed-melech let down to extricate him from the dungeon, where he must otherwise have perished. He needed no persuasion to fit the materials to his arms, in order to secure the proffered deliverance[f]: so we should thankfully embrace the salvation of Christ, regarding it as altogether *the fruit of his love*, and *the effect of his power*. Did we but attend the ordinances in such a frame as this, they would soon prove "the power of God to the salvation" of our souls.]

[e] Rev. iii. 17. [f] Jer. xxxviii. 9—12.

OUTLINE NO. 1072

THE REFLECTIONS OF A PENITENT.

Jer. xxxi. 18—20. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that*

I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.

THERE is a wide difference between ostentatious sanctity and true piety. Hypocrites always endeavour to attract the attention of the world. The true penitent, on the contrary, affects privacy and retirement: though cheerful before men, his sorrows are deep before God: were his groanings overheard by the world, he would probably be made an object of pity or derision; but God beholds him with pleasure and complacency[a]. Ephraim, or the ten tribes, are represented in the text as penitent; the secret working of their minds is here opened to our view: and this accords with the experience of every repenting sinner. God then declares how acceptable such repentance is in his sight.

The passage naturally leads us to consider,

I. The reflections of a true penitent—

We first see the state of his mind *in the beginning of his repentance*—

He reflects on his incorrigibleness in the ways of sin—

[Men seldom turn to God, till subdued by heavy afflictions: nor does the rod at first produce any thing but impatience. The penitent calls to mind his perverseness under such a state. He compares his conduct with an untamed heifer[b]. He laments that there is such enmity in his heart against God.]

He pleads with God to turn and convert his soul—

[a] Isai. lxvi. 2.

[b] The bullock, while unaccustomed to the yoke, rebels against the will of his master: though nourished and supported by him, it will not subserve his interests: when chastised, it rebels the more; yea, repeated strokes serve only to inflame its rage, and to call forth its more strenuous resistance: nor will it ever submit, until it be wearied out, and unable to maintain its opposition. Thus the sinner generally fights against God.

[He feels the necessity of divine grace to change his heart[c]. He therefore cries to God, "Turn thou me." He ventures like the prodigal to address God as *his* God. He urges this relation as a plea to enforce his request.]

We next see the state of his mind *in the progress of his repentance*—

He reflects upon the progress he has made—

[He has felt very pungent grief on account of his iniquities[d]. Through the remonstrances of his conscience he has been "ashamed." He has been "even confounded" by discoveries of his own corruptions. His constitutional propensities, which were the reproach of his youth, are still his burthen, and his grief[e].]

But he gives the glory of his advancement to God alone—

[He had cried to God for the gift of converting grace. He now acknowledges that grace to have come from God. He ascribes his deeper insight into the corruptions of his own heart to the illuminating operations of God's Spirit. Thus he adopts from his heart the confessions of Job[f], and of Paul[g]—]

How acceptable to God such a penitent is, appears from,

II. The reflections of God over him—

The penitent can scarcely find terms whereby to express his own vileness; but God accounts no honours too great for such a person—

He owns the penitent as a "dear and pleasant child"—

[The lower thoughts we have of ourselves, the higher God has of us. While we are confounded before him, he "rejoices over us with joy." While we are saying, "Surely such an one as I cannot be a child of God," He delights in testifying that

[c] John vi. 44.

[d] This is the import of that significant action of "smiting upon the thigh:" see Ezek. xxi. 12.

[e] The expressions of his grief rise in a climax; he repents, he smites on his thigh; he is filled with shame; he is confounded before God. This, though an afflictive process, is a salutary and blessed experience; as it argues deeper self-knowledge, and an increasing view of the purity of God's law.

[f] Job xl. 4. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 10

we are his children[h]. God appeals, as it were, to our contrition, in proof that we are his.]

He further expresses his compassionate regard for him—

[The chidings and rebukes of God are all in love[i]. But the afflicted penitent is apt to complain with Zion of old[k]—God however never feels for us more than when he hides his face from us. Like a tender parent, he longs to renew to us the tokens of his love[l]. The contrite soul may apply to itself those gracious declarations[m]—]

He promises to manifest his mercy towards him—

[God never will despise the broken in heart[n]. No past sins, however heinous, shall be remembered against them[o]. For such God has prepared a glorious inheritance in heaven[p].]

He grants to him all that he himself could possibly desire—

[What more could the penitent ask of God than an assurance of his adoption into God's family, a declaration of God's love towards him, and a promise that he shall find mercy at the last day? Yet these are all expressed in God's reflections over Ephraim. What inexpressible comfort should this administer to drooping penitents!]

APPLICATION—

[Can God testify of *us* as of Ephraim in the text?———If he cannot, we must expect shame, confusion, and agony at the last day[q]. If he can, we are assured of happiness both in this world and the next[r].]

[h] The force of these positive interrogations is the same as if they had been expressed negatively: they import a strong affirmation: see 1 Sam. ii. 27, 28.

[i] Heb. xii. 6. [k] Isai. xlix. 14. [l] Isai. xlix. 15, 16.
[m] Isai. liv. 7, 8. [n] Ps. li. 17. [o] Isai. i. 18.
[p] Matt. xxv. 34. [q] Dan. xii. 2. and Matt. xiii. 49, 50.
[r] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

OUTLINE NO. 1073

THE SURE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

Jer. xxxi. 30. *Every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

POPULAR sentiments, even when they become so general as to be reduced to a standing proverb,

are not *therefore* to be received as true: they must be tried, exactly as if they were the suggestions of any solitary individual; since the direction given us by God himself is, "Prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good[a]." There was amongst the Jews an established proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The Prophet Ezekiel, as well as Jeremiah, mentions this[b]: and both of the prophets declare, that, whatever ground for it had existed in past times, God would in future visit with his judgments offenders themselves, and not deal with men in a way that should involve the innocent with the guilty. True it is, that, in the very Decalogue itself, he had said, that he would "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him[c]:" but his dispensations henceforth, and especially "in the latter days," should bear rather the stamp of individuality, in accordance with men's personal habits; responsibility attaching to those only whose conduct should merit his displeasure: "Every one should die for *his own* iniquity; and every man that should eat the sour grape, *his* teeth should be set on edge."

In considering this solemn declaration, I shall notice it,

I. As an answer to the prevailing sentiment of that day—

It must be confessed that there was ground for this sentiment—

[God, in his conduct towards the whole human race, had given occasion for it. Our first parents sinned; and all their posterity became heirs of their guilt and misery. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, even over those who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression[d]:" yes, "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; and by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation[e]." This alone, methinks, would justify the proverb,

[a] 1 Thess. v. 21. [b] ver. 29. with Ezek. xviii. 2—4.
[c] Exod. xx. 5. [d] Rom. v. 12—14. [e] Rom. v. 18, 19.

"The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

But besides this, God, in his dealings with his own peculiar people, had, on many occasions, caused the children to suffer for the iniquities of their parents. At the general deluge, and at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, the new-born infant suffered no less than the most abandoned parent; as was the case also when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with all their respective families, went down alive into the depths of the earth. There were instances, also, wherein the offenders themselves had either been removed from this world, and their survivors were left to suffer for *their* iniquities; or where the offender himself escaped, whilst others were punished on his account. It was in David's days that a famine of three years was sent to punish Saul's violation of the engagements which, many hundreds of years before, had been made with the Gibeonites[f]: and, for David's numbering of the people, seventy thousand of his subjects were slain, whilst he himself was spared[g]. Manasseh, too, had been taken to his rest, when for "*his* iniquities, which the Lord would not pardon," the whole nation of Judah was carried into captivity in Babylon[h]. And even in the dispersion of the Jewish nation by the Romans, and in all the calamities they have suffered to this time, "on them has come all the blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar[i]." The people, who murdered their Messiah, said, "His blood be on us and on our children;" and, verily, his blood has been on their children, even to the present hour.

In truth, constituted as the world is, there is a necessity that the happiness of children should, to a very great extent, depend on their parents. It is scarcely possible but that, both in our *civil* and *social* relations, evil should arise from this source; since the welfare of subjects must, of necessity, be affected by the conduct of their governors; and the welfare of children by the conduct of their parents.]

But though *in some respects* this proverb was true, yet, *as uttered by them,* it was false and impious—

[In this proverb the Jews intended to *exculpate themselves*, and to *cast reflections upon their God.* They wished it to be understood that they were not suffering for *their own* sins, but for *the sins of others;* and that God dealt hardly with them, in making *them* amenable for sins which they had not committed. But, not to mention that a man himself is in some respect

[f] 2 Sam. xxi. 1, 6. [g] 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 15.
[h] 2 Kings xxiii. 26, 27. and xxiv. 3, 4. [i] Matt. xxiii. 35.

punished in his children, where is there, on the face of the whole earth, a person who has not merited all that has ever come upon him? and who has not reason to acknowledge that "God has punished him far less than his iniquities have deserved[k]?" Whatever may have been the primary *occasion* of our troubles, there is abundant *ground* for them within ourselves: "A living man can have no just reason to complain[l]:" for, if we had had our just desert, there is not one amongst us that would not have been in the very depths of hell, long, long ago. Those who have been partners in iniquity *may*, and *will*, reproach *each other* in that place of torment; but none shall be able to reproach their God: every one of those unhappy spirits shall be constrained to say, "True and righteous are thy judgments, Lord God Almighty[m]:" and the day that is appointed for assigning to men their respective doom, is on this very account declared to be "the day of the revelation of the *righteous* judgment of God[n]." This proverb, therefore, when uttered with a view to justify man as innocent, or to reproach God as unjust, must be regarded as profane and impious in the extreme.]

The answer given to it in my text is singularly important,

II. As a declaration of God's established rule of procedure in all ages—

Sin, by whomsoever committed, shall not go unpunished. It shall be followed with evil,

1. In this world—

["A sour grape," whether eaten by one or many, "will set the teeth on edge:" and sin, whether of a more open or secret kind, will be followed with evil to the soul. Let the profligate and abandoned sinner, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer, say, whether what he has followed with such avidity, and regarded as such a source of exquisite delight, has not, in the issue, been productive of pain? Let the injury which he has sustained, in his name, his health, his property, be taken into the account, and he will be constrained to acknowledge that "the way of transgressors is hard[o]." We may appeal with confidence to every sinner in the universe; "What fruit had ye, even at the time, of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Verily, not an hour had elapsed after your sweetest gratifications, before they were embittered with shame, and fear, and self-reproach.

[k] Ezra ix. 13. [l] Lam. iii. 39. [m] Rev. xvi. 7.
[n] Rom. ii. 5. [o] Prov. xiii. 15.

But, not to confine ourselves to the licentious profligate, let us ask of the man who, whilst externally moral, is yet under the influence of evil tempers, Who ever harboured envy in his bosom, and did not find it "as rottenness in his bones[p]"? Or, who ever gave way to anger, malice, revenge, and did not experience in his own soul a disquietude, that of itself was sufficient to shew the hateful character of the dispositions he indulged?

Let us, however, pass by the *positive* violations of God's Law, and notice only those which, for distinction sake, I will call *negative*. Suppose a person to be "blameless" as Paul himself, in relation to outward sin, but only to be lukewarm in relation to the course of life prescribed by the Gospel: suppose him to be observant of all "the forms of godliness, but yet destitute of its power:" will that man be happy? No, in truth: he is wicked in God's estimation: and "there is no peace to the wicked[q]." "Throughout his whole life," he is, and must of necessity be, "in bondage to the fear of death[r]:" and to speak to him of death and judgment, is to rob him of all the false peace that he enjoys.

Then I say, that even in this world "no man can eat the sour grape without having his teeth set on edge;" so indissoluble is the connexion between sin and misery; and so irreversible is God's decree, that "it shall be ill with the wicked[s]."]

2. In the world to come—

[Here there may be mitigations of the pain which sin brings with it: but hereafter the misery of sinners will be unmixed and unabated to all eternity. God cautions us not to deceive ourselves with any false hopes respecting this: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[t]." It matters not who he be: he may be the first monarch upon earth; yet shall not his earthly dignity protect him: for God has said, that "though hand join in hand, he shall not go unpunished[u]." Whatever be the inequalities of God's dispensations *now;* some suffering in consequence of the sins of other men, whilst the perpetrators of those evils escape with impunity; in that world to which we are hastening, "every man shall bear his own burthen[x]," and shall "receive from God according to his works: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, God will give eternal life;

p Prov. xiv. 30. q Isai. lvii. 21. r Heb. ii. 15.
s Isai. iii. 11. t Gal. vi. 7, 8. u Prov. xi. 21.
x Gal. vi. 5

but to those who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil[y]."]

To all of you then I SAY—

1. Contemplate, not so much the immediate, as the more remote, consequences of sin—

[Sinful indulgences no doubt bring with them a present gratification; but it is the part of wisdom to inquire what the ultimate effects of them will be. A man with a cup of poison in his hand would not consider whether its contents were pleasant to his taste, but whether it would not soon be productive of agonies and death. Now we are told respecting the sinner, that "though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth; yet his meat in his bowels is turned; it is the gall of asps within him[z]." To the truth of this every soul of man must bear witness: and most of all is the truth of it felt in that land from whence no traveller returns. Is it not madness, then, to purchase any momentary gratification at so vast an expense; knowing, as we do, that if we repent of it, our sorrows must be proportionably great; and that, if we repent not of it, they must be infinitely greater to all eternity? I pray you, Brethren, bear in mind the instruction in my text, and calculate well the evils that will ensue, ere you venture any more to taste forbidden fruit — — —]

2. Contemplate the provision which God has made for those who repent them of their sins—

[You have heard that men may suffer for the sins of others. But know, that they may also be benefited by the sufferings of another. Yes, my Brethren, if in Adam you died, in Christ you may be made alive; and through the sufferings of your adorable Lord you may be not only delivered from the sufferings which you yourselves have merited, but may be made partakers of a glory and felicity which you could never otherwise have obtained. If, then, you have been ready to apply to yourselves that proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," now apply to yourselves the converse of it, which is contained in the Gospel; where you are told, that Christ died, the just for the unjust[a];" and that "by his stripes you may be healed[b]." Wonderful, indeed, is this truth, and well calculated to reconcile us to the loss which we sustained by the first Adam. Yes, know that the Son of the living God "has become a

[y] Rom. ii. 6—9.
[z] Job xx. 12—14.
[a] 1 Pet. iii. 18.
[b] 1 Pet. ii. 24.

curse for us[c];" and that "God has made him, who knew no sin, to become sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him[d]." O, bear in mind this stupendous mystery, which must for ever silence every murmur against those dispensations which appear to us so dark, and which have given rise to the proverb before us. Know, of a surety, that "if you die, it is for YOUR OWN iniquity;" but if ever you be saved, it is for the righteousness of *your incarnate God.* Rely then on *him.* Look to *him* to remedy all that your own iniquities have brought upon you: and thus, where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound; and as sin hath reigned unto death, so shall grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord[e].]

[c] Gal. iii. 13. [d] 2 Cor. v. 21. [e] Rom. v. 20, 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1074

THE NEW COVENANT.

Jer. xxxi. 31—34. *Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

THOUGH there is among us a general idea that Christianity is founded on the Jewish religion, yet the specific difference between them is very little understood. It would be well for us to have clear views of this subject: for unless we know the comparative excellency of the new covenant above that which it superseded, we can never justly appreciate the great advantages we enjoy. In the passage before us, the Mosaic and Christian covenants are contrasted; and the abolition of the one, and the

establishment of the other, are foretold. But before we enter on the comparison between the two, it will be necessary to observe, that there are, properly speaking, only *two* great covenants; under the one or other of which all the world are living: the one is the *Adamic* covenant, which was made with Adam in Paradise, and which is entirely a covenant of works; the other is the *Christian* covenant, which, though made with Christ, and ratified by his blood upon the cross, was more or less clearly revealed from the beginning of the world. It was first announced in that promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." It was afterwards more plainly opened to Abraham, and afterwards still more fully to Moses. The Mosaic covenant, properly speaking, was distinct from both of these: it was not altogether a covenant of works, or a covenant of grace; but it partook of the nature of both. As containing the *moral* law, it was a re-publication of the covenant of works: and as containing the *ceremonial* law, it was a dark and shadowy representation of the covenant of grace. It was a mixed covenant, designed for one particular nation; and given to them, in order to introduce the covenant under which we live. Of *that* the prophet says, that it should in due time be superseded by a new and better covenant; and the Apostle, quoting this whole passage, says, that "it had *then* waxed old, and was vanishing away[a]."

In order to give a clear view of this subject, we shall state,

I. The blessings of the new covenant—

These being specified by the prophet, and copied exactly by the Apostle, we shall adhere strictly to them, without attempting to reduce them to any other order than that which is here observed. In the new covenant then, God undertakes,

1. To write his law in our hearts—

[This is a work which none but God can effect. The kings were commanded to write a copy of their law, each one

[a] Heb. viii. 8—13.

for himself: but, though they might write it on parchment, they could not inscribe it on their own hearts. This however God engages to do for all who embrace the new covenant. He will make all the laws which he has revealed, agreeable to us: he will discover to us the excellency of them; and "cause us to delight in them after our inward man." He will make us to see, that the moral "law is holy and just and good," even while it condemns us for our disobedience to its commands; and that "the law of faith" also (that is, the Gospel) is a marvellous exhibition of God's mercy and grace, and exactly suited to the necessities of our souls. He will engage our wills to submit to his; and dispose our souls to put forth all their energies in obedience to his commands. This he has repeatedly promised[b];" and this he will fulfil to all who trust in him.]

2. To establish a relation between himself and us—

[By nature we are enemies to him, and he to us. But on our embracing of this covenant, he will "give himself to us as our God, and take us for his people." In being our God, he will *exercise all his perfections for our good;* his wisdom to guide us, his power to protect us, his love and mercy to make us happy, his truth and faithfulness to preserve us to the end. In taking us for his people, he will incline us to *employ all our faculties in his service.* Our time, our wealth, our influence, yea, all the members of our bodies, and all the powers of our souls, will be used as his, for the accomplishment of his will, and the promotion of his glory. We may see this illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. God took as much care of him, as if there had been no other creature in the universe; and he devoted himself to God, as much as if his faculties had not been capable of any other use or application. The effects of this relation are not indeed equally visible in all the Lord's people: but the difference is in the degree only, and not in the substance and reality.]

3. To give us the knowledge of himself—

[There is a knowledge of God which cannot be attained by human teaching; a spiritual experimental knowledge, a knowledge accompanied with suitable dispositions and affections. But this God will give to those who lay hold on his covenant: "He will reveal himself to them, as he does not unto the world." He will "put them into the cleft of the rock, and make all his glory to pass before their eyes;" and proclaim to them his name, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious[c], &c. He has promised, that "all his people

[b] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. [c] Exod. xxxiii. 18—23. and xxxiv. 5—7.

shall be taught of him[d]," "the least as well as the greatest," yea, the least often in preference to the greatest[e]. And in proof that this promise is really fulfilled to all who receive the Gospel, St. John declares it to be a known acknowledged fact: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true[f]."]

4. To pardon all our iniquities—

[Under this new covenant, we have access to "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" and by washing in it "we are cleansed from all sin[g]." Whatever transgressions we may have committed in our unregenerate state, they are all put away; "though they may have been as scarlet, they have become white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they are as wool"———]

Hitherto we have spoken only *in a general way* of the blessings of the new covenant: we proceed to notice them *more particularly*, while we state,

II. The difference between the old and new covenants—

We have already observed, that by "the *old* covenant" is meant the Mosaic covenant, made with the Jews on Mount Sinai. Between this and the Gospel covenant there is a wide difference. They differ,

1. In the freeness of their grants—

[The Mosaic covenant imposed certain conditions to be fulfilled on the part of the Jews; and on their fidelity to their engagements all the blessings of that covenant were suspended[h]. But we find no condition specified in the new covenant. Must we attain the knowledge of God, and become his people; and have his law written in our hearts? true: but these are *not acts of ours*, which God requires *in order to* the bestowing of other blessings upon us; but *blessings which he himself undertakes to give.* If any say, that repentance and faith are *conditions* which we are to perform, we will not dispute about a *term;* you may call them conditions, if you please; but that which we affirm respecting them is, that they constitute a part of God's free grant in the Gospel covenant; so that they are not conditions, in the same sense that the obedience of the Jews was the condition upon which they held the promised land: they are, as we have just said, blessings freely given us by God; and not acts of ours, whereon to found our claim to other blessings.

[d] Isai. liv. 13. John vi. 45. [e] Matt. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.
[f] 1 John v. 20. [g] 1 John i. 7. [h] Exod. xxiv. 6—8.

It is worthy of observation, that the Apostle, mentioning this grant of the new covenant, particularly specifies, that God, "*finding fault with*" the Jews for their violations of the old covenant, says, "I will make a new covenant[i]." Had he said, "*Commending them* for their observation of the inferior covenant, God said, I will give you a better covenant," we might have supposed, that it was given as a reward for services performed: but when it was given in consequence of the hopeless state to which their violations of the former covenant had reduced them, the freeness of this covenant appears in the strongest light.]

2. In the extent of their provisions—

[We shall again notice the different blessings as they lie in our text. God wrote his law *upon tables of stone*, and put it into *the hands* of those with whom his old covenant was made: but, according to his new covenant, he undertakes to put it into *our inward parts*, and to write it on *our hearts*. What a glorious difference is this! and how beautifully and exultingly does the Apostle point it out to his Corinthian converts[k]!

God established indeed a relation between himself and his people of old: but this relation, though nominally the same with ours, was by no means realized to the same extent. To true believers amongst them he was the same that he now is: but what was he to the people at large, with whom the covenant was made? He interposed for them doubtless, on many occasions, *in an external way;* and they *externally* acknowledged him: but his communications to us are *internal*, and our devotion to him is *real* and *spiritual*.

Under the old covenant, God revealed himself to his people in types and shadows; and the ceremonies which he appointed were so dark and various, that they could not be known to the generality, unless the people carefully instructed each other. On this account it was commanded that the children should inquire into the reason of various institutions (as that of the passover, and the feast of unleavened bread, and the redemption of the first-born); and their parents were to explain them[l]. But with us, there are only two institutions, and those the plainest that can be imagined; and the great truths of our religion are so interwoven with our feelings, that a person whose desires are after God, needs no other teaching than that of God's word and Spirit; and though the instructions of ministers, of masters, and of parents, are still extremely useful, yet may a person obtain the knowledge of God and of salvation without being indebted to any one of them: and it is a fact, that many persons remote from ordinances, and from

[i] Heb. viii. 8.
[k] 2 Cor. iii. 3.
[l] Exod. xii. 26, 27. and xiii. 8, 14, 15.

instruction of every kind, except the blessed book of God, are often so richly taught by the Spirit of God, as to put to shame those who enjoy the greatest external advantages[m].

The forgiveness of sins which was vouchsafed under the old covenant, was not such as to bring peace into the conscience of the offender: ("the sacrifices which he offered, could not make him perfect as pertaining to the conscience[n]:") nor indeed were any means appointed for the obtaining of pardon for some particular offences: but under the new covenant, "all who believe are justified from *all things*, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses[o]:" and, "being justified by faith, they have *peace* with God[p]," "a peace that passeth understanding," "a joy unspeakable and glorified."

How glorious does the new covenant appear in this contrasted view! and what reason have we to adore our God for the rich provisions contained in it!]

3. In the duration of their benefits—

[The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the old covenant was intended to intimate to the people, that their pardon was not final: had their guilt been perfectly removed by them, the Apostle observes very justly, that "they would then have ceased to be offered; because the worshippers would have had no more conscience of sins:" but, inasmuch as the sacrifices were annually renewed, they were, in fact, no more than "*a remembrance of sins* made every year[q]." But under the new covenant God engages to "*remember* our sins and iniquities *no more:*" they are not only *forgiven* by him, but *forgotten;* not only *cancelled*, but "*blotted out* as a morning cloud[r];" not only *removed from before his face*, but "*cast behind his back into the depths of the sea*[s]." His former people he put away, "though he was an husband unto them:" but to us his "gifts and callings are without repentance[t]." This is particularly marked by the prophet, in the verses following our text[u]; and by an inspired Apostle, in his comment on the very words we are considering. He is shewing the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that appointed under the law: and he confirms his position from this circumstance; that the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests could never take away sin, and therefore were continually repeated; whereas Christ's sacrifice, *once offered*, would *for ever* take away sin, and "perfect *for ever* all them that are sanctified." He then adduces the very words of our text; and says, that,

[m] See 1 John ii. 27. where the Apostle manifestly refers to the expressions in our text.
[n] Heb. ix. 9.
[o] Acts xiii. 39.
[p] Rom. v. 1.
[q] Heb. x. 1—3.
[r] Isai. xliv. 22.
[s] Mic. vii. 19.
[t] Rom. xi. 29.
[u] ver. 35—37.

in these words, "*the Holy Ghost is a witness to us;*" for that, in promising first, that "the law should be written in our hearts," and then, that "our sins and iniquities should be remembered no more," he had attested fully the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, and given ample assurance, that those who relied upon it should *never* have their sins imputed to them[x].

It is needless to multiply words any further upon this subject; for the old covenant, with all its benefits, was to continue only for a limited period; whereas the new covenant is to continue to the end of the world; and its benefits to the remotest ages of eternity.]

INFER—

1. The folly of making self-righteous covenants of our own—

[Why did God give us another covenant, but because the former was inadequate to our necessities? Shall we then be recurring to the old covenant, or forming new ones of our own upon the same principle? Take your own covenants, and examine them, and see what grounds of hope they afford you. We will give you leave to dictate your own terms: say, if you please, "You are to repent and amend your lives: and *on those conditions* God shall give you eternal life:" *Can* you repent, *can* you amend your lives, by any power of your own? Have you agreed with God what shall be the precise measure of your repentance and amendment? Have you attained the measure which you yourselves think to be necessary, so that you can say, My conscience witnesses for me, that I am fully prepared to meet my God? If not, see to what a state you reduce yourselves: you need none other to condemn you: for God may say, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee." O be not thus infatuated: cast not away the Lord's covenant for such delusive projects of your own: but, instead of depending on your own weak endeavours, go and lay hold on that better covenant, which provides every thing for you, as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus.]

2. The blessedness of those who obey the Gospel—

[You have "a covenant which is ordered in all things, and sure[y]:" and you have a Mediator, who, having purchased for you all the blessings of this covenant, will infallibly secure them to you by his efficacious grace, and all-prevailing intercession. Place then your confidence in him. Employ him daily (if I may so speak) to maintain your interest in it; and give him the glory of every blessing you receive. Your enjoyment of its benefits must be progressive, as long as you continue

[x] Heb. x. 11—18. [y] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

in the world — — — Let your desires after them be more and more enlarged: and in due time you shall enjoy them in all their fulness. It is in heaven alone that you will fully possess them: but there you shall perfectly comprehend the meaning of that promise, "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God[z]."]

[z] Rev. xxi. 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1075

THE CHURCH'S SECURITY.

Jer. xxxi. 35—37. *Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of Hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord.*

THE study of the prophecies is most instructive. We are apt to read them as though they did not concern *us:* whereas in them we see the purposes of God unfolded to us; and, by a comparison of them with past and passing events, we see God so ordering every thing in heaven and earth, that all should be accomplished in their season. Into futurity, also, we gain an insight. And shall not that, which so interests Jehovah himself, as to be predicted by him in terms the most solemn that can possibly be imagined, interest *us?* Behold, how the Almighty here describes himself in all his majesty and glory! behold, too, the solemnity of his assertions, equivalent, in fact, to oaths! And to what has all this respect? It has respect to his Church and people, for whom he has the richest mercies in reserve, and to whom he pledges himself that these mercies shall be vouchsafed in due season. Let us contemplate, then,

I. The promises here made to God's Church and people—

Certainly they refer,

1. To God's ancient people, the Jews—

[To them he here promises, that, whatever they may suffer, they shall not be lost, as other nations have been, amongst their conquerors; but shall be preserved a distinct people, even to the end; and shall, notwithstanding all that they have done to provoke him utterly to cast them off, be restored once more to his favour, as in the days of old.

The manner in which these promises are made deserves particular attention. Who is it that pledges himself for the accomplishment of these things? It is no other than the Creator and Governor of heaven and earth. And what assurance does he give that they shall be fulfilled? He declares that the heavenly bodies shall sooner be annihilated, than his word be forgotten; and that never, till we had measured the highest heavens, and penetrated to the inmost recesses of the earth, should one jot or tittle of it fail.

And if we look into their history, we find every thing fulfilled hitherto. In their captivity in Babylon, their national character was still preserved; and after it, they were restored to their own land. So at this hour, though for above seventeen centuries they have been scattered over the face of the whole earth, they are still a peculiar people as much as ever: and if we knew for certainty where the ten tribes are, I think they also would be found to have retained so much of their original character, as clearly to distinguish them from all the people amongst whom they sojourn. Nor can we doubt for a moment but that God will again manifest himself to them, as in former days. He has not cast them off for ever: "they are still beloved of him for their fathers' sakes:" and "his gifts and calling to them are without repentance[a]." Forsaken as they are at present, it is but for a little moment: for as God, by the rainbow in the heavens, has given a pledge that his oath relative to any future deluge shall be fulfilled; so has he sworn that his kindness shall not ultimately depart from Israel, or his "covenant with them ever be dissolved[b]."]

2. To the Christian Church—

[To apply the passage exclusively to the Church of Christ is shamefully to pervert it. Yet we must not withhold from her, her share of the blessings which God has promised to her. Throughout all the prophecies, the Church of God, previous to the coming of the Messiah, and subsequent to the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, is considered as one; that which first existed being the foundation, and that which was afterwards erected being the superstructure, of the same

[a] Rom. xi. 28, 29. [b] Isai. liv. 7—10.

heavenly temple: and the promises made to it, so far as they respect it in its former state, will have a *literal* accomplishment; and, so far as they pertain to it in its latter state, a *spiritual* or *mystical* accomplishment. In this latter sense we may properly apply to the Christian Church the prophecy before us. For it has enemies, even as Israel of old; yet "shall not the gates of hell ever prevail against it." Notwithstanding it has often been at a very low ebb in the world, yet is it preserved by the power of God: and though, for its degeneracy, God's wrath might well break forth against it to destroy it, yet is it preserved for good, and shall at a future period be greatly honoured of the Lord; being extended far and wide, and being established over the face of the whole earth. For the accomplishment of this, we have the same security as the Jewish Church has for the fulfilment of the promises made to her, namely, the promise and the oath of Almighty God: and we may be as sure that the honour reserved for her shall be accorded to her in due time, as if we saw it imparted before our eyes. As sure as God himself is true, "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ;" and "the whole earth, both of Jews and Gentiles, shall be one fold under one Shepherd," "there being only one Lord, and his name One."]

But to enter fully into these promises, we should consider also,

II. The use which is to be made of them by individual Believers—

They certainly may be applied by believers to themselves, for the comfort of their own souls. The promise that was made, in the first instance, to Israel, relative to the possession of the promised land[c], is represented by St. Paul as applicable to every believer, throughout all ages: "The Lord hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me[d]." And the confirmation of these promises by an oath[e] was intended by God to administer consolation to *us*, no less than to those to whom they were immediately delivered; as St. Paul further assures us: "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath;

[c] Deut. xxxi. 6. [d] Heb. xiii. 5, 6. [e] See Note [b].

that, by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we* might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us[f]." Yet I must confess that they are to be used with caution. We should be careful,

1. As to the persons to whom they belong—

[It is the believer alone who is really interested in the promises of God. What part or lot in them has the unbeliever? None at all. It is "in Christ alone that they are made over to us:" and we must be "in Christ," before they can truly belong to us. Before we take hold, then, on any particular promise as belonging to *us*, we should ask ourselves, whether we have really come to Christ, and are living by faith upon him? There are many who speak with extreme boldness on this subject, as though every promise in the Bible must be fulfilled to *them*, whilst yet they have never truly repented of their sins, nor ever experienced a thorough change of heart and life. There are in some a surprising hardness, and boldness, and confidence, which, in my estimation, mark them as lying under a very desperate delusion: and the more confident they are, the more I tremble for their state. The promises of God's blessed word are for the humble, the broken, the contrite: *they* are entitled to take to themselves every promise in the word of God: but, where these dispositions are wanting, faith is a mere phantom, and confidence a delusion. Let this, then, be well and clearly ascertained. "Examine carefully whether ye be in the faith." "Prove and try your ownselves," and, when that point is satisfactorily determined, then take to yourselves every promise of the Lord: and look upon all that he has promised, as your inalienable, everlasting inheritance.]

2. As to the extent to which they are to be applied—

[A distinction must be made between that which, in the first instance, was personal or temporal, and that which was intended for the Church at large. The promises are not to be applied to ourselves, any further than as our circumstances accord with those of the persons to whom they were made: and the accomplishment of them is to be expected chiefly, if not exclusively, in a spiritual view. Take, for instance, the promises made to Moses and to all Israel, under the peculiar difficulties to which they were reduced: it would be perfectly absurd to expect the fulfilment of them to ourselves at this day, any further than a correspondence of circumstances rendered them applicable to our own case. If this rule be not

[f] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

attended to, we shall both raise in ourselves the most unwarrantable expectations, and subject God himself to the imputation of violating his own word.]

3. As to the use that is to be made of them when so applied—

[Doubtless they are intended to comfort and encourage the Lord's people, under all their trials. But they are not intended to supersede the exertions of any, or to foster in them any undue security. God will not work, but by means: and he expects us to use the means, as if we were labouring to accomplish every thing by our own unassisted efforts; whilst yet we renounce all confidence in ourselves, and rely only upon him. Take, for instance, the promises in our text. Are we to hope that God will keep us as a peculiar people, unless we "come out from the world[g]," and endeavour to "keep ourselves unspotted from it[h]?" Or are we to assure ourselves that "God will not cast us off for all that we have done," if we never humble ourselves for our past sins, or endeavour to avoid sin in future? The great use of the promises is, to convey to us those blessings which in ourselves we are unable to attain: and, if we improve them not for these ends, we do but deceive ourselves, and betray to ruin our own souls.]

Lay down, therefore, for yourselves the following RULES:

1. Seek to gain Christ himself, as your portion—

["The promise of life," and of every thing pertaining to it, "is in Christ Jesus[i]." And if we apprehend him, we become possessed of every thing that is good, in title at least, if not in actual possession: for "all things are ours, if we are Christ's[k]." "In him all the promises of God are Yea, and in him Amen[l]," sure, irreversible, eternal. Our first object, therefore, must be to obtain an interest in Christ. And I can never too strongly inculcate this: for if, "instead of entering into the fold by the door, you climb up some other way," you will only deceive yourselves to your ruin[m].]

2. Embrace his promises with humility—

[By humility, I do not mean a hesitation whether you shall rely upon them, or a doubting whether you are worthy to embrace them. Those are the actings, not of humility, but of pride and unbelief. For who in the whole universe is *worthy?* Or what humility is there in *questioning the truth of God?* It is, as unworthy, that you are to lay hold of them,

[g] 2 Cor. vi. 17. [h] Jam. i. 27. [i] 2 Tim. i. 1.
[k] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. [l] 2 Cor. i. 20. [m] John x. 1, 9.

and to plead them before God in faith and prayer: and, provided only you embrace them as unworthy, and regard them as made to you only in Christ, and for Christ's sake, you can never place too strong an affiance in them: "the stronger you are in faith, the more will you give glory to God[n]." But that against which I wish to guard you, is, the hardness of which I before spoke. Truly, there is, amongst some professors of religion, a mode of speaking about their own interest in the promises which is disgusting in the highest degree, and, I really think, impious. Their want of reverence for God shews, that they are deluded by the devil, who has appeared to them under the semblance of "an angel of light[o]." I wish not to rob you of one atom of joy: but I would have you always to "rejoice with trembling[p]:" and, however strong your faith may be, I would say, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall[q]:" "Be not high-minded, but fear[r]."]

3. Improve them all with care—

[What will be the effect of the promises on the Jews, in the day that they shall be restored to the Divine favour? "They will come with weeping; and with supplication will God lead them[s]." Nor shall this frame be incompatible with joy: on the contrary, it shall be a prelude to joy[t]," even as the seed-time is to the harvest[u]: and it will be followed with holiness as its never-failing attendant[x]. Hear what St. Peter says: "God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we may be partakers of a divine nature, and escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust[y]." Only improve them to this end, and you can never rely on them too strongly, or plead them too confidently before God. To all of you, then, I would say, having so many and great promises, Dearly beloved, let us use them to their proper end, even to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[z]."]

[n] Rom. iv. 20. [o] 2 Cor. xi. 14. [p] Ps. ii. 11.
[q] 1 Cor. x. 12. [r] Rom. xi. 20. [s] ver. 8, 9.
[t] ver. 12, 13. [u] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.
[x] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—28. [y] 2 Pet. i. 4. [z] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

OUTLINE NO. 1076

THE FUTURE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS.

Jer. xxxii. 37—42. *Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto*

this place, and I will cause them to dwell in safety: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the Lord; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them[a].

AMONGST the numberless manifestations of God's mercy in the Scriptures, we cannot but be particularly struck with this, that scarcely ever do we find any awful denunciation of God's wrath against his offending people, but there is some gracious promise annexed to it, as an encouragement to them to repent. In the whole preceding part of the chapter before us, God declared his determination to give up Jerusalem into the hands of the Chaldeans. Yet behold, at that very time does God open to his people the most consolatory prospects of an ultimate restoration to their own land, and of numberless attendant blessings to be poured out upon them.

In considering the passage which we have just read, I shall have occasion to shew you,

I. What blessings God has in reserve for his chosen people—

These correspond exactly with the state in which they were at the time when the promise was made. They had grievously departed from God; and, on account of their iniquities, they were doomed to be cast off, and to be sent into captivity in Babylon. But, as God had graciously determined to temper judgment with mercy, he here promises to them,

1. A restoration to their own land—

[A restoration from Babylon is doubtless the point here primarily intended: and that was vouchsafed to them at the

[a] There is a Discourse on this text: but this is inserted, in order to illustrate its bearing on the *Conversion of the Jews*.

expiration of seventy years, according to the predictions of the prophet respecting it. But the terms in which this is declared almost necessarily lead our minds to a restoration yet future; because it was from Babylon alone that the first deliverance was vouchsafed, whereas the promise relates to a deliverance "out of all countries, whither they have been driven:" and it speaks of their being caused to "dwell safely;" whereas they experienced but little of peace and safety after their first restoration: they were grievously harassed, from time to time, by the kings of Syria and Egypt, and their other neighbours, till at last they were subdued, and utterly destroyed, by the Romans: but at their restoration from their present dispersion, they will enjoy a state of peace and prosperity far beyond all that they ever experienced in the most favoured periods of their history: Jerusalem, instead of being defended, as formerly, against enemies, by ramparts of man's construction, "will be inhabited as a town without walls; because the Lord will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her[b]." This is repeatedly and distinctly promised: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken: but there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby[c]:" that is, she shall be alike inaccessible to enemies of every description, by reason of the effectual protection afforded her by Jehovah. And in this happy state shall they continue, "planting vineyards, and drinking of the wine thereof; and making gardens, and eating of the fruit of them; and being so securely planted in their land, as never again to be pulled up, and rooted out of it[d]."]

2. A renewed acknowledgment of their relation to him—

[During their captivity in Babylon, and still more in their present dispersion, they are like a repudiated wife, whom her husband will no more acknowledge. To apprise them of God's determination to put them away, the Prophet Hosea was instructed to "call his son Lo-ammi;" for, says God, "ye are not my people, and I will not be your God[e]." Their connexion with Jehovah being thus dissolved, their enemies have been able to oppress them, and indeed have grievously oppressed them in every nation where they have been scattered. But the time is coming, when God will again shew himself in their

[b] Zech. ii. 4, 5.
[c] Isai. xxxiii. 20, 21.
[d] Amos ix. 14, 15.
[e] Hos. i. 8, 9. and ii. 1, 2.

behalf, and renew to them all the wonderful interpositions which he vouchsafed to them in former days. At least ten times is this promise in our text repeated to them by the prophets, that "they shall again be God's people, and he their God;" or, as it is very emphatically said, "a God unto them[f]." Nor can any language more fully depict the blessings contained in this promise, than that of the Prophet Isaiah: "Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended[g]."]

3. A spirit of piety poured out upon them—

["One heart and one way" have distinguished the Lord's people in all ages of the world: nor can either the heart or the way be more justly described, than in those comprehensive words, "The fear of God." This *disposition* belongs not to us by nature, nor is this *conduct* found in any natural man: it is the gift of God, who "by his Spirit convinces us of sin," and reveals a Saviour to us, and inclines us to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service. There are many points, of subordinate moment, in which the children of God may differ: but in these things they all agree: "as face answereth to face in a glass, so in these respects doth the heart of man to man." All, without exception, feel themselves to be guilty and undone sinners; all cleave unto the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope; and all walk before God, in a way of holy, tender, and affectionate obedience. And this marks their character to the latest hour of their lives. They would no more divest themselves of the fear of God, than of love, or joy, or confidence, or any other gracious affection whatsoever. And this holy state of mind will eminently distinguish the Jews in the latter day. It will be given to them "for their own good, and for the good of their children after them:" for, in truth, this kind of piety, whilst it invariably exalts the person in whom it is found, will always display itself in a diligent attention to the rising generation. At present, the children of the Jews are neglected in a very extraordinary degree: but it will

[f] Heb. viii. 10 [g] Isai. lx. 15, 16, 19, 20.

not be so in that day: for, like Abraham of old, the parents will "command their children, and their households after them, to fear the Lord;" and the whole nation, for many successive generations, will be "an holy people unto the Lord."

Here it will be proper to observe, that this diffusion of piety will not precede, but follow, their restoration to their own land: at least, so, I think, the Prophet Ezekiel has plainly intimated; saying, "When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; THEN shall they know that I am the Lord: neither will I hide my face any more from them; for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God[h]." But in that day, I hesitate not to say, they, even the whole nation, will be eminently holy; since "THEN God will sprinkle clean water upon them, and they shall be clean: from all their filthiness, and from all their idols, will he cleanse them: a new heart also will he give unto them, and a new spirit will he put within them: he will even put his Holy Spirit within them, and will cause them to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments, and do them: and they shall dwell in the land which he gave to their fathers; and they shall be his people, and he will be their God[i]."]

As we speak with confidence respecting their final possession of these blessings, it will be proper to shew,

II. What security they have for the enjoyment of them—

In the behalf of this desolate and outcast people are pledged,

1. The veracity of God—

[God will make a covenant with them; not like the covenant which he made with them in former days, wherein the possession of his blessings was suspended upon their fidelity to God, and which, being violated by them, was utterly dissolved; but he will make one, which, in consequence of God's undertaking every thing for them, as well as for himself, shall never be broken, but shall endure for ever. This may well be called a Covenant of Grace; for in it God gives all, and man receives all: God engages, not only that he will not depart from his people to do them good, but that he will put his "fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from him." And here I would particularly

[h] Ezek. xxxix. 25—29.
[i] Ezek. xxxvi. 24—28. and Jer. xxiv. 6, 7.

call your attention to the way in which he undertakes to keep them: it is not through the medium of a bold, presumptuous unhallowed confidence, such as you see in many professors of religion, and such as betrays itself in rash, unscriptural assertions: it is by "putting his *fear* into their hearts," and causing them to "walk humbly before him," and to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling." I would that this matter were better understood in the Christian world; and that they who profess to believe with Abraham, would, with Abraham, "fall upon their face before God," and walk before him with a perfect heart[k].

That such a covenant shall be made with them in that day, is fully declared in the chapter preceding our text: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people[l]." The interest also which "*their children*" shall have in this covenant is further declared: "They shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children, for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore[m]."]

2. The power of God—

[At their first espousal to God, "he rejoiced over them to do them good:" and since his rejection of them for their unfaithfulness, "he has rejoiced over them to bring them to nought[n]." But at the period we are now speaking of, he will again "rejoice over them to do them good;" as says the Prophet Zephaniah, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing[o]." It

[k] Gen. xvii. 1—3. [l] Jer. xxxi. 31—33. with Heb. viii. 8—10.
[m] Ezek. xxxvii. 25—28. [n] Deut. xxviii. 63. [o] Zeph. iii. 17.

appears, at present, as if the obstacles to the accomplishment of all these promises were absolutely insurmountable: but "if God will work, who shall let it?" He says, "I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." Shall it then fail of its accomplishment in due season? "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" Has he scattered them according to his word, and preserved them a separate people, notwithstanding their dispersion; and shall he not gather them again, and "bring upon them all the good that he has promised them?" If all the obstacles that men or devils can ever raise against it were united in one common mass, I would say to them, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[p]."]

LEARN, then, from hence,

1. What *we*, if we are the Lord's people, may expect for ourselves—

[It is not to the Jews, *as Jews*, that the spiritual promises are made; but with them *as believing in the Messiah*, and *as submitting to the government of David their prince*. If this, then, be our character, they are made to us; and we, substituting the heavenly for the earthly Canaan, may take to ourselves all these great and precious promises, expecting assuredly that God will thus exert himself for us, till he has put us into the full possession of all the blessedness of heaven. If we have been brought from our wanderings "to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem[q]," then are we interested in this covenant, and God will confer upon us its choicest blessings; regarding us as "his peculiar treasure," and exerting for us his Almighty power, "to keep us from falling, that in due season we may be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[r]." Learn, my beloved Brethren, to realize these glorious expectations, and to enjoy in your own persons what you anticipate in behalf of your Jewish brethren.

Fix your eyes steadily on that good land in which God has assuredly determined to plant you; and contemplate him as engaging, "with his whole heart, and with his whole soul," to effect his gracious purpose. I say, view this whole work of grace in its commencement, its progress, its consummation; and, if your conscience bears witness that he has "given you a heart and a way to fear him," then rely on him to preserve you from ever departing from him, and to complete for you in heaven what he has begun on earth: for "faithful is He that hath called you, who also will do it[s]."]

[p] Zech. iv. 7.
[q] Heb. xii. 22.
[r] 1 Pet. i. 5. Jude, ver. 24.
[s] 1 Thess. v. 24.

2. What encouragement we have to labour for our Jewish brethren—

[The object which we have in view is, not their restoration to their own land (that, I conceive, we may well leave in the hands of Providence, without presuming to interfere with it), but their conversion to Christ, and the everlasting salvation of their souls. Compare their present state of degradation and ruin with those periods of their history when God vouchsafed to them the manifestations of his love and favour; and say whether we should not wish to restore them to their former happiness and honour? Yet I conceive that the blessedness that awaits them will as far exceed all that their forefathers ever enjoyed, as that of their forefathers surpassed any thing that was experienced by the heathens around them. Indeed we are told, that "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[t]." "Come, then, to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against all the enemies of our God" and of his Christ. Had you to attempt the work of their conversion without Divine assistance, I readily grant that you might well be discouraged: but when you see what God has promised them, and to what an extent his veracity and power are pledged to effect it, methinks you should all be animated with a holy ambition to become God's honoured instruments for their welfare. The indifference which has been shewn in relation to this work for seventeen hundred years may well fill us with astonishment: and even yet the Christian world is not alive to it as they ought to be. A very small measure of zeal in this great cause is regarded as extravagance. But shall Almighty God engage in it "with his whole heart and with his whole soul," and shall we be lukewarm? — — — Arise, I say, to your duty. Your God is already gone out before you: there is already "a stir among the dry bones;" and the time is fast approaching, when we may hope to see them "arise a great army." Let zeal for God and love for man have their perfect work among you. Be like-minded with God himself, and in every possible way "rejoice over them to do them good" — — — so shall the time be hastened forward, and "the kingdoms of the whole world, both of Jews and Gentiles, become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ."]

[t] Isai. xxx. 26.

OUTLINE NO. 1077

SALVATION IS OF GOD, FROM FIRST TO LAST.

Jer. xxxii. 39—41. *I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul*[a].

THERE is not any thing more common than for persons, who treated with contempt God's threatened judgments, to sink under them in the most abject manner, as soon as they begin to feel them. The Jews would not be persuaded for a long season that God would ever deliver them into the hand of the Chaldeans: but when they found that his word was ready to take effect, they were overwhelmed with grief and despondency. To preserve them from running to this extreme, and to shew them that the Divine judgments would be tempered with mercy, the prophet was inspired to foretel their future restoration to that very land from whence they were about to be carried captive. But it is evident that this prophecy has respect to a far greater deliverance, even to the redemption of the world from sin and Satan, and the restoration of sinners to their forfeited inheritance. A near prospect of the punishment which their sins have merited, often brings them, with a very quick transition, from presumption to despair: but, for their encouragement, God teaches them to look to him as an all-sufficient helper, and to rely on him for the carrying on of the good work wherever he has begun it. In this view of the passage we may notice,

I. The means of our conversion—

In our natural state we are afar off from God, going astray like sheep that are lost. In order to recover us,

[a] The preceding Discourse on this text shews its bearing upon *the Conversion of the Jews:* this its reference to the *Christian Church.*

God puts his fear into our hearts—

[While unconverted, we "have no fear of God before our eyes:" we all walk after the imagination of our own hearts, seeking happiness in various ways, according as we are led by our different inclinations or situations in life. But in conversion, God "gives us one heart and one way." By these words we do not so much understand, an unity of affection and pursuit, in opposition to the multiplicity of desires with which every carnal mind is distracted (though doubtless that idea is included in them) as, that oneness of sentiment and action that pervades all who are the subjects of divine grace. As on the day of Pentecost, so, in every age and place, Christians, as far as they are taught of God, are of one heart and mind. The prejudices of education do indeed make a difference between them with respect to some matters of less importance; and an undue stress laid upon these things too often prevents that close union and communion that should subsist between all the members of Christ's mystical body: but, with respect to the grand point of fearing God, there is no difference among them: all, without exception, have "one heart and one way," in that they desire above all things, and earnestly endeavour, to walk in the fear of God all the day long — — —]

This is to the unspeakable benefit of ourselves, and of all connected with us—

[Too often are men dissuaded from entertaining this fear, lest it should prove injurious to them; but none ever received it into their hearts without looking back upon all their former life with shame and sorrow: yea, they have ever considered the season of their first submission to it as the most blessed era of their lives; and, instead of regretting that they ever yielded to its influence, they invariably wish to have their whole souls subjected to its dominion. And as they find it thus for their own good, inasmuch as it enlivens their hopes, and purifies their hearts, so is it for the good of their children, yea, and of all connected with them. It makes them better in every station and relation of life, whether as parents or children, masters or servants, rulers or subjects: it leads them to fill up their various duties to the honour of God; and to communicate, to the utmost of their power, the same blessed disposition to all around them.]

The same divine agency, that first converted us, proves afterwards,

II. The source of our perseverance—

"It is not in man to direct his own steps:" our progress in the way of duty depends on,

1. The engagements of God's covenant—

[God has entered into covenant with his Church and people, and undertaken to preserve them from apostasy. Nor is this covenant liable to be broken, like that which he made with the Israelites in the wilderness[a]: it is and will be "everlasting," because God himself engages to do all which is requisite for our support. "*He will not depart from us* to do us good;" he may, like a wise parent, sometimes frown, and sometimes chastise; but, while he acts in this manner, he does it for our good, no less than when he lifts up the light of his countenance upon us. He has said that, "if we break his statutes, and keep not his commandments, he will visit our transgression with the rod, and our iniquity with stripes; nevertheless his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail; his *covenant* will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips[b]." "*He engages further that we shall not depart from him.*" Here, doubtless, is the greater danger, seeing we have a heart "bent to backslide from him;" and, if left by him for one moment, we should relapse into all our former sins. But he knows how to establish the wavering, or restore the fallen; and thus to "perfect his own strength in our weakness." He may leave us for a season, as he did Hezekiah, that we may know what is in our hearts: but he assures us, that our "steps shall be ordered by him," and that our "light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day:" he will so "draw us, that we shall run after him;" and so "keep us from falling, that an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."]

2. The exertions of his power—

[God speaks of himself in language accommodated to our low apprehensions of his nature, and declares that he will *exert all his power*, and *find all his delight*, in doing us good. His people, after their dismission from Babylon, laboured under many difficulties in rebuilding their city and temple; yet, through the good providence of God, they surmounted all. Thus shall we meet with many obstructions before we arrive at the Paradise above: but God will regard us as trees of righteousness, and "will plant us in that land assuredly with his whole heart and with his whole soul." Who then shall defeat his efforts, or disappoint his aim? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In vain shall earth and hell be confederate against us; for "hath he said, and will he not do it? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?" He will

[a] Jer. xxxi. 31, 32. [b] Ps. lxxxix. 31—34.

never cease to work, till he has fulfilled in us all his good pleasure, and "perfected that which concerneth us:" "he will keep us by his own power through faith unto salvation."]

We may OBSERVE from hence,

1. How suitable is the way of salvation!

[Foolish and ignorant men would be better pleased with a gospel that left them to *earn*, either wholly or in part, their own salvation. But, alas! how ill adapted would such a Gospel be to us, who are "insufficient of ourselves even to think a good thought!" How much more suitable is the promise in the text, wherein God undertakes to do every thing in us, and for us! Let us then receive thankfully what God offers freely. Let us embrace "a covenant that is ordered in all things and sure;" and rejoice in serving God, who so rejoices in saving us.]

2. What effectual care is taken that we should not turn the grace of God into licentiousness!

[There are, it must be acknowledged, some who abuse this doctrine, (for what is there, however excellent, which men will not abuse?) and take occasion from it to rest in a state of worldliness and sloth. But the very promise gives us a sufficient antidote against the poison it is supposed to convey: it tells us indeed, that God will keep us from departing from him; but it tells us also, that he will do this by "*putting his fear into our hearts.*" This destroys at once all delusive hopes; inasmuch as it shews us, that, if we be not living habitually in the fear of God, we are actually departed from him, and consequently can have no ground whatever to expect salvation at his hands. Let the carnal and slothful professor of religion well consider this. His abuse of this promise cannot invalidate its truth; but it may deceive his soul to his eternal ruin. Be it ever remembered, that the very same fear which God puts into our hearts in our first conversion, must continue to operate, and *that* too with increasing activity, to the end of our lives; and, that we have no longer any reason to think our past experience to be scriptural, than while we cultivate that fear, and endeavour to "walk in it all the day long." We do not mean that every *occasional* backsliding should subvert our hopes; but, if ever the fear of God cease to be the leading principle in our hearts, or to stimulate us to further attainments in holiness, we may be sure that we have deceived our own souls, and that our religion is vain. May God keep us all from such a fatal delusion for his mercy's sake!]

OUTLINE NO. 1078

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER.

Jer. xxxiii. 3. *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

IT is curious to observe in what different estimation the same persons are held by their fellow-creatures and by God. We may certainly be allowed to say, that there was not, at the time referred to in our text, a more holy person upon earth than Jeremiah; yet by his countrymen was he held in such abhorrence, as to be deemed worthy only of imprisonment and death. God, on the contrary, honoured him with the highest tokens of his regard. As a friend (so to speak), he repeatedly visited him in prison; he encouraged him to inquire into his most secret counsels, and confided to him the most stupendous mysteries both of his providence and grace.

We need not however confine our attention to Jeremiah: for the words, though primarily addressed to him, may well be applied to all who suffer for righteousness' sake, and to all who are truly devoted to their God. In this view, they accord with many other passages of Scripture; and contain a most important truth, namely, that prayer is the *necessary* and *effectual* means of obtaining divine knowledge.

I. It is necessary—

God is always represented as the fountain of light and truth—

[He is "the Father of lights:" and whatever light there is in the whole creation, it is all derived from him. There are indeed amongst us stars of greater and smaller magnitude; but all in themselves are opaque, and destitute of any native lustre: they shine only by a borrowed light, and are glorious only in proportion as they reflect a greater or less portion of Jehovah's beams. Even where their knowledge is only in arts and sciences, it must be traced to God as its author; much more must it be so, when it pertains to things which the natural man is not able to receive. "In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted, I have put wisdom[a]."]

[a] Exod. xxxi. 3, 6.

Those who would obtain knowledge from him must seek it by prayer—

[This is God's command. He needs not indeed to be prevailed upon by our solicitations, as though he were of himself averse to grant us his blessings; but still it is our duty to pray unto him; and he teaches us to expect his blessings only in the discharge of this duty: "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find:" "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God; and it shall be given him." We are far from saying that prayer is the *only* mean of obtaining knowledge; for we must read, and meditate, and search after truth, as much as if all depended on our own unaided exertions: but we say, that our exertions without prayer will be of no avail: we must "search for knowledge, as for hid treasures;" but we must also "cry after it, and lift up our voice for understanding:" when we combine the two, "then shall we find the knowledge of God: for *the Lord giveth* wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[b]."]

Nor is this an arbitrary, but a wise and gracious appointment—

[By this means our hearts are prepared for the reception of divine knowledge. If we could obtain it purely by our own study, we should pride ourselves in it, as having made ourselves to differ from those around us: but when we have been made sensible that it is God alone who "openeth the eyes of the understanding," we learn to acknowledge him in our gifts, and to humble ourselves in proportion to the benefits we have received at his hands. We are stirred up also to improve our knowledge as a talent committed to us, and to diffuse, for the benefit of others, the light with which God has irradiated us.]

As all are invited to ask, so every prayer shall be heard and answered.

II. It shall be effectual—

The things which God shewed to Jeremiah, related, not merely to the return of the Jews from Babylon, but to Christ and his spiritual kingdom[c]: and, respecting Christ, "he will shew great and mighty things unto all that ask him."

1. To the ignorant—

[Little do the world imagine what great and glorious things are known to those whom they despise; things, "which prophets and kings in vain desired to see," and "which angels

[b] Prov. ii. 1—6. [c] ver. 14—16.

themselves desire to look into." It is possible enough that the truths themselves, *as a system*, may be known to the ungodly: but, in their *use*, their *excellence*, their *importance*, they are known to those only who are taught of God. To these God has revealed the source and depth of their own depravity; the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ's atonement; the fulness of grace that is treasured up in him; and the blessedness of all those who experience his salvation. These things, "great and mighty" as they are, are brought to their minds "with power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance:" and, by the revelation of them to their souls, they are "made wise unto salvation."]

2. To the enlightened—

[It is not at first only that "God brings us into marvellous light:" there is, in the spiritual, as well as the natural world, a progress from the glimmering of the early dawn to the splendour of the noon-day sun. Job had known much of God by the hearing of the ear; but far more when he could say, "Now mine eye seeth thee." And Moses had bright discoveries of Jehovah on various occasions; but brighter far, when God was pleased to "proclaim to him his name," and "make all his glory pass before his eyes." Thus, however advanced the believer may be in knowledge and in grace, there are in God, and in the wonders of his redeeming love, heights and depths and lengths and breadths, of which he has yet no adequate conception. Not that any fresh truths shall be revealed to him, much less any which are not contained in the Holy Scriptures: but the same truths shall be applied to his soul with a clearness and energy vastly surpassing any thing he has before experienced, provided he give himself unto prayer, and wait upon God for the teachings of his Spirit: "The light of the moon shall be to him as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days[d]."]

We shall CONCLUDE this subject with a word,

1. Of reproof—

[Scarcely any subject is so reprobated by ungodly men, as this. They consider the influences of the Holy Spirit as chimerical; and all expectation of answers to prayer, as enthusiastic and absurd. They have never experienced these things themselves; and therefore they suppose that no one else can. But they have never used the means; how then should they attain the end? Suppose a person to affirm, that, with the help of glasses, he could see things invisible to the naked eye: would not any one, refusing to make the experiment, be justly deemed

[d] Isai. xxx. 26

unreasonable, if he denied the possibility of such a thing, and imputed the affirmations of the other to vanity and folly? Every one knows, that objects dimly seen, may be made clearly visible by the use of glasses: and why may not the acquisition of an humble contrite frame be equally useful to the eye of our minds? There is not any one so ignorant, as not to know, how passion and interest distort the objects that are seen through them; and that they who are under their influence, view things very differently from what they appear to an impartial judge. Thus then it is in spiritual things: "whilst the eye is evil, the whole mind is dark; but when it is single, the whole is full of light:" and when God, by removing our earthly and carnal dispositions, presents heavenly objects to the soul in their true character, they shine with a lustre inconceivable to the blind ungodly world. Would any then ascertain whether God will teach his people? let him pray: but let him pray with sincerity, with fervour, and with faith: these are the requisites of effectual prayer[e]; — — — and prayer thus offered, shall never go forth in vain.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Many are discouraged because they have not those manifestations of God to their souls, which they have heard, and read of, in the experience of others. But have they mortified their in-dwelling lusts as much as others; and been as constant and importunate in prayer? But be it so: "God gives to every one severally as he will:" yet none shall ever say, that they have sought his face in vain. Our talent may be small; our capacity narrow and contracted: yet have we no cause to despond: for God has said, that "he will reveal to babes and sucklings the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent: and if only we were more conscientious in looking to God for his blessing on the ordinances; if, before we come to them, while we are under them, and after we have returned from them, we were earnest in prayer for the influences of his Spirit; we should not so often return from them empty and unedified. God would hear us, and "would answer us, and would shew us great and mighty things, which we know not." Our private meditations also on his blessed word would be attended with "an unction which should teach us all things[f]." He would "open our understandings to understand the Scriptures." "At the very beginning of our supplication" would he send his Holy Spirit to instruct us[g]; yea, "before we called, God would answer: and while we were yet speaking, he would hear[h]."]

[e] See Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. Jer. xxix. 12. Jam. i. 5—7.
[f] 1 John ii. 20, 27. [g] Dan. ix. 20—23. [h] Isai. lxv. 24.

OUTLINE NO. 1079

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS—A MATTER OF IMPORTANCE TO GOD AND MAN.

Jer. xxxiii. 6—9. *Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.*

THE more fully the subject of the restoration and conversion of the Jews is considered, the more important it will appear. The prophetic writings are full of it; and the obscurity of those writings arises in a great measure from the gross perversion of them, of which even pious ministers have been guilty, through a long succession of ages. Those whose office has been to interpret them, have almost universally applied them spiritually to the Gentiles; overlooking the plain literal meaning of them, as addressed to the Jewish people: and by this means, not only has the attention of the Christian world been drawn from the Jews, but it has been drawn also even from the prophecies themselves, because of the impenetrable veil that has been cast over them.

That the passage before us relates to that subject, no one can entertain a doubt. And that it has never yet been fulfilled, is equally clear; not only because the ten tribes of Israel are combined with Judah, but because the effects which are here announced as to be produced by the event, were never, in any degree, produced by the return of the Jews to Babylon. The different nations of the earth were never led to fear and tremble by reason of the goodness and prosperity which were then procured unto the Jewish nation

We must therefore, of necessity, look forward to a future period for the full accomplishment of this prophecy.

In discoursing on this prophecy, I shall consider,

I. The event predicted—

Respecting the restoration of the Jews to their own land, I say little; because, though it seems as clearly revealed as any event in all the book of God, there are some who doubt whether the prophecies relating to it are to be understood literally; and because, in labouring for the welfare of that people, we have no respect whatever to any thing but the conversion of their souls to God.

In the passage before us God promises to them,

1. A discovery of his will—

[In the whole of their civil and ecclesiastical polity, they are in the state described by the Prophet Isaiah; "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint: from the sole of the foot even to the head there is so soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putréfying sores[a]." But God promises here, that he will "restore health unto them, and cure them, by revealing unto them the abundance of peace and truth."

To enter fully into the meaning of these words, we must bear in mind, that, in the writings of Moses, the way of salvation is revealed only under types and shadows; and that, even by the strictest observance of them, "the Jews could not be made perfect as pertaining to the conscience[b]:" consequently, under existing circumstances, when they are precluded from a possibility of observing the law, they cannot by any means obtain rest unto their souls. They cannot by repentance; because rivers of tears could never wash away one sin. They cannot by good works; for their best works are imperfect, and can never atone for sin, and purchase an eternity of bliss. And, as for any rites prescribed by their Rabbins, in addition to the Mosaic Ritual, they are held, as the superstitious ordinances of the Pharisees were, in utter abhorrence by Almighty God. All the Rabbins in the universe, therefore, cannot tell an afflicted and tempest-tossed Jew how he may obtain peace with God and in his own conscience. But when God shall take away the veil that is on the hearts of that people, "he will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." He will shew them, that every shadow in their law is derived from Christ, who is the substance. Had

[a] Isai. i. 5, 6. [b] Heb. ix. 9.

they a temple, an altar, a high-priest, a sacrifice, a sanctuary? These are all contained in Christ, who is the one great sacrifice for sin, the priest that offers it, the altar on which it is presented, the sanctuary "in which dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and in which it comes up with acceptance before God. There is not any single ordinance, or even a vessel in the sanctuary, which was not intended to shadow him forth, and with which he does not, in some respect or other, correspond: so perfectly did Moses execute the divine command, "in making every thing according to the pattern shewn to him in the mount." This being discovered to the Jews by the clear light of the Gospel, they will see "an abundance of truth;" such as we, who are little conversant with the law, have scarcely any conception of. And from the fulness of Christ, so richly displayed before them, they will have "a peace which passeth all understanding," yea, such "an abundance of peace," that it will "flow down like a river." All that can disturb their minds shall be put far from them by the discovery of Christ. Are they oppressed with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment? They shall see that he has by the one offering of himself upon the cross, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for sin, and completely reconciled them to their offended God. Do they feel their need of a perfect righteousness wherein to stand before God? They shall see that he has wrought out a righteousness for them by his own obedience unto death; and that "that righteousness shall be unto all, and upon all, who believe in him." In a word, they shall see in him an accomplishment of what the prophet Daniel has foretold: "He shall finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in for his believing people everlasting righteousness[c]." And, in the view of these things, they shall "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."]

2. A manifestation of his favour—

[God promises in my text, and again in ver. 11, "to build them as at the first." This necessarily carries us back to the time when he redeemed them out of Egypt, and "brought them forth with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm." Let us call to mind all the wonders that were then wrought in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness; let us remember how God went before them in the pillar and the cloud; how he fed them with manna from heaven, and with water from the flinty rock; how he appeared to them on Mount Sinai, and gave to them his law; how he protected them from every enemy, and brought them in safety to the promised land; how he subdued before them seven nations.

[c] Dan. ix. 24.

greater and mightier than they; and, above all, how he dwelt in his sanctuary, and manifested to them his favour, so as he never had done to any people upon earth: let us call all this to mind, and then we shall have some faint conception of the blessings which he has in reserve for his outcast people. I doubt not, but that, in a *temporal* view, as far as similar interpositions shall be found necessary for them, they shall experience them at the hands of God[d]: but in a *spiritual* view, I am perfectly sure that none of these things shall be wanting unto them: they shall be delivered from their spiritual bondage; they shall "eat of Christ, who is the spiritual meat, and drink of that spiritual drink, even of that rock which will follow them, which is Christ Jesus[e];" and at last have an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[f]." We may stretch out our imaginations to the uttermost, and grasp all that was ever done for that people in the days of old; and we may be sure that it shall all be renewed to them in the latter day with ten-fold advantage[g]: "that nation shall then sing as in the days of her youth, when she came up out of the land of Egypt[h]."]

3. A communication of his grace—

[What is there that any sinner in the universe can need? *That* shall, in the richest abundance, be imparted unto them. Do they need "the pardon of their iniquities?" So fully shall it be vouchsafed, that "all their sins shall be cast into the depths of the sea;" not into the shallows, from whence they might be brought again; but into the depths, where they shall never again be found[i]. Do they need the renovation of their natures after the Divine image? This also shall be vouchsafed unto them; for, not in my text only, but in numberless passages of the prophetic writings, does God promise to them this inestimable blessing[k]. Thus fully to this purpose speaks the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will take you from among the Heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. THEN (N. B. THEN) will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them[l]. In a word, nothing shall be wanting

[d] Isai. xi. 16. [e] 1 Cor. x. 3, 4. [f] 2 Pet. i. 11.
[g] Jer. xxx. 18—20. [h] Hos. ii. 15.
[i] Compare Mic. vii. 19. with Jer. l. 20. [k] Jer. xxxii. 36—42
[l] Ezek. xxxvi. 24—27.

to the completion of their happiness; "their cup shall be full, and overflow" with joy.]

From the event itself, let us proceed to consider,

II. The vast importance of it—

If we were to contemplate only the happiness of that people, the temporal, spiritual, eternal happiness of millions living, and of millions arising in every successive age, methinks we should need no more to mark the importance of the event that is here predicted. But we are content to wave the contemplation of this part of our subject altogether, and to limit our views to the points more especially referred to in our text. Mark,

1. The interest which God himself has in it—

[God says of it, "It shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them." Of course, when we speak of God rejoicing in it, we merely accommodate ourselves to the language of Scripture, in which God condescends to speak after the manner of men; in order that by conveying to our minds such ideas as we are able to comprehend, he may produce on us such impressions as the subject calls for. Behold, then, to God it will be a source of joy; and in him will be realized the description of the Father in the Parable, receiving, and rejoicing over, his repentant son. Hear how the prophet represents this matter: "Be ye glad, and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying[m]. So also, in another place, in yet stronger terms: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For, as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons (thy restorers) marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee[n]." Moreover, this event will greatly tend to the honour of God. His power and goodness are seen by all people, in the works of creation: but in the restoration of his outcast people, his glory will shine forth as in its meridian splendour, before all the nations of the earth. It

[m] Isai. lxv. 18, 19. See also Zeph. iii. 17. [n] Isai. lxii. 4, 5.

will be seen of all; because, the Jews being dispersed over all the world, and the motion amongst them being simultaneous throughout the earth, the attention of all will be fixed upon them, and the glory of God appear upon them. In that event shall all his perfections shine forth; and especially his mercy and love, his truth and faithfulness. Greatly as he was magnified in their deliverance from Egypt, he will be far more exalted in that day; because the work will be infinitely more extensive, and the effects produced upon them be incomparably more glorious. For in that day, "the people shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of his planting, the work of his hands, *that he may* be glorified[o]." In a fore-cited chapter, this is very strongly and beautifully marked. Of all that a king possesses, there is nothing so dear to him, nothing with which his honour is so intimately connected, as his crown; yet such shall the Jewish people be, in the estimation of their God: "Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God[p]." Yes, he will hold them forth before the whole world, as the dearest objects of his love, and the brightest monuments of his glory.]

2. The interest of the whole world involved in it—

[At this wonderful sight will all the nations of the earth "fear and tremble." At their coming out of Egypt, was somewhat of this effect produced on the surrounding nations[q]: and amongst those who shall desire to retain them in bondage, will the same terror prevail, at the period that we are now contemplating. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt," says God, "will I shew unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see, and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth; their ears shall be deaf: they shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee[r]." But on immense multitudes will a far different effect be produced: they, indeed, shall "fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that God hath procured unto his people;" but it will be with a holy, reverential fear, such as that which is invariably signified by those words in the epistles of the New Testament, even such as is imported in that injunction, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Yes, in every place will this effect be produced. It will not merely attract the attention of the whole world, but will create within them a desire to know and serve that

[o] Isai. lx. 20, 21. and lxi. 1—3.
[p] Isai. lxii. 3.
[q] Exod. xv. 15, 16.
[r] Mic. vii. 15—17.

God who has done such things for them. In every place will the beholders be filled with wonder; and with the deepest conviction will cry out, as the worshippers of Baal did before them, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God!" Then will be fulfilled what the Prophet Zechariah has spoken: "Ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you[s]." To this event St. Paul evidently refers, when he says, "If the fall of the Jews be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead[t]?"

Now, let the restoration of the Jews be considered in this light; and what *shall we think of it*, or what terms shall we ever find whereby to express its inconceivable importance? Surely we are highly culpable in this matter. We do not study the Holy Scriptures in reference to this event; and, when we meet with it, we pass it over without any serious reflection, or accommodate it to ourselves as the only persons interested in it. But is this right? Should we be so indifferent to the welfare of God's ancient people? or, if we account that of so little consequence, should we be regardless of the honour, and, if I may so express myself, the very happiness of God? And should the conversion and salvation of the whole world be of so little value in our eyes? I call you, Brethren, to blush and be confounded, because of your past insensibility; and now to rise, as fellow-workers with God, to the performance of your duty.]

But, that I may IMPROVE the subject for the good of all, I would entreat you to take occasion from it to consider—

1. What blessings you yourselves enjoy—

[It is said, "The Law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*[u]." Hence it appears, that if you are believers in Christ, these blessings are already yours: you are "brought nigh to God," having been rescued from the sorest bondage: and through a discovery of Christ, as revealed in the Gospel, you enjoy in your souls "an abundance of peace," and joy, and holiness, and, by anticipation at least, of glory also. You are shining as lights in a dark world; and are a source both of joy and honour to your God, and of conviction and consolation to those around you. In you, the millennial period

[s] Zech. viii. 23. [t] Rom. xi. 12, 15. [u] John i. 17.

is, as it were, begun. O, rejoice ye, and shout for joy; and endeavour, in every possible way, to glorify the God of your salvation — — —]

2. What reason you have to seek the welfare of your Jewish brethren—

[Behold with what glorious consequences it will be followed! Though, for argument sake, I have waved all consideration of the Jews themselves, methinks you will not agree to dismiss them from your minds. The recollection of what their ancestors, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself, have done for you, will never suffer you to be indifferent about the salvation of their souls. But, if we could suppose such a malignant disposition in you towards that unhappy people, shall the glory of God and the salvation of the whole world have no effect upon you? I call you then, every one of you, to exert yourselves, in whatever way the Lord may enable you, for the restoration of his outcast people. Make known to them the Gospel, whereby all other blessings shall flow down into their souls; and, as they are the appointed reapers of the Gentile world, go forth to hire them for the work; that, as their ancestors reaped the first-fruits, these may be the happy means of gathering in the whole harvest.]

OUTLINE NO. 1080

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD CONDEMNED.

Jer. xxxv. 13, 14. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me.*

THE service of God is called, by St. Paul, "a reasonable service:" and that it is most reasonable, appears, as from numberless other arguments, so especially from this, that we ourselves exact of our fellow-creatures that very kind of service which God requires from us. A father expects to be honoured by his children; and a master to be feared and

obeyed by his servants: and God, acknowledging the equity of those expectations, says, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear[a]?" It is true, that, in respect of the degree in which these dispositions are required, there must be an infinite distance between what is due to God and to man: but if the smallest measure is due to man, much more is the greatest measure due to God: and if we are to obey man in *any* thing, much more ought we to obey God in *every* thing.

This is put in a very striking point of view in the chapter before us, where God brings forth the Rechabites, and their obedience to the commands of Jonadab their progenitor, to shame the Jews who were disobedient to his commands.

The Rechabites were originally Kenites, descended from Hobab the father-in-law of Moses[b]: and, because they had no inheritance in Israel, it is generally thought that they still continued aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. But we apprehend, that, at some period subsequent to the division of Canaan, they had embraced the Jewish faith; because Jehonadab, the very person spoken of in our text, was the person whom Jehu took up into his carriage, saying, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord:" and, had he not been reckoned amongst the true Israelites at that time, we conceive that Jehu, at the very moment that he was usurping the throne of Israel, would not have courted so publicly his alliance and support[c]: nor do we think that Jeremiah would have taken the Rechabites "into the house of the Lord," and "into the chamber of a man of God," if they had not been possessed of the full privileges of Israelites. The circumstance of their having no inheritance in Israel will sufficiently account for their being called "strangers" there, and for their wishing to avoid the jealousies and contentions which the acquisition of wealth might occasion. But however

[a] Mal. i. 6. [b] 1 Chron. ii. 55. [c] 2 Kings x. 15, 16.

this might be, the complaint which was founded on their obedience, is the same, and is deserving of very peculiar attention.

Let us consider this complaint,

I. Simply—

Jonadab had enjoined on his posterity not to build, or plant, or sow, or even to possess houses or vineyards; but to dwell in tents, and to drink no wine: and they had been observant of his injunctions now for the space of three hundred years. But on occasion of the Chaldean invasion, they had fled to Jerusalem for safety[d]: and the Prophet Jeremiah set wine before them, and invited them to refresh themselves with it. This was done by God's command, not with a view to tempt and ensnare them, but for the purpose of displaying their adherence to the commands of their father, and of putting to shame the whole Jewish nation for their disobedience to the commands of God. At first sight, this appears to be an insulated fact, in which we have little concern; but there is in reality, at this day,

1. The same regard for the commands of men—

[It should seem as if a reverence for tradition were inherent, as it were, in our very nature; since we find it equally prevailing in every quarter of the world.

It is universally found in relation to *civil and political institutions*. However different the forms of government may be which obtain amongst the various nations of the world, there exists amongst the natives a partiality in favour of it, insomuch that they are ready to fight, and even to die, in its defence. Republics, and monarchies, whether limited or absolute, are on a par in this respect: whichever has been established, has on that account a great pre-eminence in the estimation of the people.

This zeal for what has been handed down from our forefathers obtains, if possible, yet more strongly in reference to *religious ordinances*. There are many of the same traditions, and the same fixed adherence to them too, amongst the different religious orders of the Papists at this day, as obtained formerly amongst the Rechabites. Rites, which God never

[d] ver. 6—11.

enjoined, are venerated even beyond the plainest commandments of our God. In like manner, amongst us Protestants, every sect has its peculiar dogmas, which are adhered to from generation to generation, with a scrupulous and superstitious exactness. Notwithstanding it is manifest that there are pious men of every denomination, and that God may be served and honoured by one as well as by another, yet all are disposed to look with pity or contempt on each other, and to claim to themselves an exclusive conformity to the Divine will. Some, even in their dress and in their language, affect a singularity which they transmit to succeeding generations, and impose as distinctive badges of their community. And all these points of difference form, in the minds of each community, as great a barrier between them and others, as the self-denying habits of the Rechabites did between them and the house of Israel.]

2. The same disregard for the commands of God—

[To all of every denomination God says, as to his people of old, "Return ye now every man from his evil way." But who regards him? Do drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, and profane swearers, attend to his voice, or set themselves in earnest to amend their ways? Do the votaries of pleasure, or the people who are absorbed in the cares of this world, relax their pursuit of earthly things, and begin to set their affections on things above? Do those who rest in a mere formal round of duties without feeling any of the power of godliness, renounce their proud self-righteous conceits, and humble themselves before God as guilty and undone sinners? Do they receive with gratitude the glad tidings of salvation, and flee with becoming earnestness to the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope? Do not sinners of every class retain their habits as much as if they had never been called upon to renounce them? We ask of every individual, Have you turned from that particular way, in which, from inclination or habit, you have formerly been led; and have you truly, and penitently, and unreservedly, given up yourselves to God? We put this question to the decent and the moral, as well as to those who have given a freer scope to their corrupt appetites; 'Have the commands of God had any considerable influence on your minds?' 'Have you truly studied them, with a view to find out your departures from them, and with a determination of mind to conform yourselves to them to the very utmost of your power?' As for any partial change adopted with a view to advance your character or interest in the world, we inquire not about it: your change must be founded on the authority of God, and be commensurate with his commands, or it is of no value in his sight: the conversion must be from sin to holiness, from the world to God: nothing less than that is

required by God: and in this view of our duty, we ask again, 'Has not God the same ground of complaint against us, as he had against his people of old, that however observant we may have been of the commands of men, we have not hearkened unto him?']

But let us consider the complaint more minutely,

II. With its attendant aggravations—

In our text, there is an evident contrast formed between the obedience of the Rechabites and the disobedience of the Jews. We notice more particularly,

1. The authority from which the different commands proceeded—

[That which the Rechabites obeyed was human; that which the Jews disobeyed was divine. Yes: it is the God of heaven and earth, whom we also have set at nought. He created us for himself; yet have we considered ourselves as independent of him. He has preserved us every moment, yet have we lived in continued rebellion against him. He has redeemed us with the blood of his only dear Son; yet have we poured contempt on all the wonders of his love, as well as on the terrors of his offended Majesty. Let us only reflect on what we must all have observed, times without number: We tell a person, that such or such a line of conduct is contrary to God's revealed will; and we produce little, if any effect upon him: but if we tell him that such a conduct will destroy his prospects in the world, or expose him to shame and contempt among his fellow-creatures, we at least excite very strong emotions in his mind, even if we do not prevail to change his deportment. The truth is, we are all very sensibly alive to the displeasure of men, but lamentably indifferent to the displeasure of God; and man's authority weighs abundantly more with us than the authority of the Most High.]

2. The commands themselves—

[Whatever propriety there might be in the commands of Jonadab, they were certainly not *necessary* for the salvation of his descendants. But the commands of God are absolutely necessary, both to our present and eternal welfare. Which of them is there that can be dispensed with? Which of them is there that can be lowered or relaxed, without dishonour to God, and injury to man? Consider more particularly the commands relating to the Gospel: they are like commands to the blind, to see; to the deaf, to hear; to the lame, to walk; to the leprous, to be clean; to the dead, to arise and live for ever.

Which of these commands would the person afflicted desire to dispense with? O! the horrible ingratitude of despising the Gospel of Christ! See, Brethren, what sad reason there is for God's complaint against us!]

3. The manner in which they were enforced—

[The one injunction of Jonadab, that had been given three hundred years before, was all that had operated on the minds of his descendants; even though it had been merely suggested as a matter of expediency, without being enforced by any sanctions whatever. But God's commands have been, and still are, renewed from day to day, by ambassadors sent for that express purpose, and authorized to assure us, that eternal happiness and eternal misery depend on the regard which we pay to them. What an amazing aggravation of our guilt is this! Verily, whatever excuses we may make for our conduct now, our mouths will be shut in the day of judgment; yea, and the whole house of the Rechabites will rise up in judgment against us and condemn us.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who regard man, and not God—

[God himself rewarded the Rechabites for their adherence to the customs of their forefathers; and thereby expressed his approbation of an attention to rules, which have been derived from authority, and established by time. Whether the rules pertain to civil or religious duties, provided they do not militate against the law of God, or prove burthensome to the conscience, we conceive it is right to conform to them. But no punctuality in the observance of them can stand in the place of obedience to God. We may be zealous patriots, active partisans, strict religionists, and yet never render unto God any spiritual service, or take one step in our way to heaven. God must have the heart; Christ must be the one ground of our hope and confidence; the Holy Spirit must guide and sanctify our souls; or else we shall remain in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Let those, then, who are disposed to value themselves on their regularity and zeal in the observance of human ordinances, remember, that they are building on a foundation of sand; and that *they only* build upon a rock, who hear and do the commandments of their God[e].]

2. To those who regard God, and not man—

[Though none would go so far as to say that religion supersedes all human obligations, and justifies a contempt of

[e] Matt. vii. 24—27.

all established usages, there are many who act as if this were the real sentiment of their hearts. At the commencement of the French Revolution, this observation was verified to no small extent in our own land: many who should have been "the quiet in the land" were as eager as any to subvert that constitution, which has since approved itself the admiration and envy of the world. And it is still too often found, that persons professing a love for religion, neglect the duties of their place and station, and violate the most established usages of the society to which they belong. But such persons little think what spirit they are of, or what injury they do to the souls of men. The people who know not God will of course lay the greatest stress upon the observance of their own peculiar laws and maxims; and will blame, not the conduct only that violates them, but religion itself, as countenancing that conduct. On this account, St. Paul was careful to "give no offence in any thing." He consulted the prejudices of men, and conformed to their views and habits as far as he conscientiously could, "becoming all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." This is the conduct which we all should imitate: this is the life by which we should adorn our holy profession: this is the way to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to "win by our conversation" those who would never have been won by the written or preached word. Let the Apostle's exhortation then be the rule of our conduct; "Whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, and *of good report*, if there be any virtue, *if there be any praise*, think on these things."]

3. To those who feel an united regard for both—

[It is well indeed if you have learned to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." And we would wish every religious person to attain such a measure of consistency, as to be able to say both to the godly and ungodly, What have ye, which I have not? and, What do ye, which I do not? "Are ye Hebrews? so am I: are ye Israelites? so am I." This kind of consistency will in due time create an influence over the minds of many; and may recommend religion to generations yet unborn. We would not indeed wish any one to be burthening himself or others with superstitious observances: but to adopt the *spirit* of Jonadab's injunctions will be of incalculable advantage to us all. Self-denial and deadness to the world are amongst the most important duties of Christianity; and to live in the habitual exercise of these will be an effectual preservative from temptation. That we shall be tempted to violate our principles and our engagements, must be expected: both the world and the flesh will, as it were, "set pots of wine

before us, and say, Drink ye wine." But, if we have learned to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, we shall have our answer ready at hand, 'My Father, and my God, has forbidden it: and I will do only the things that please him.' Thus bear in mind your vows and obligations to your God, and you shall "never be led away by the error of the wicked, nor fall from your own steadfastness."]

OUTLINE NO. 1081

JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE SACRED ROLL.

Jer. xxxvi. 27, 28. *Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, (after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah,) saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.*

TRUTH has peculiar force, when it is embodied, and exhibited in action. A speculative view of it may perhaps be derived as well from abstract statements; but its practical efficacy is exceedingly enhanced by a sight of it in actual operation. For instance: the enmity of the carnal mind against God is acknowledged by us in general terms; but we are more forcibly impressed with a conviction of it, when we behold such a display of it as is contained in the chapter before us. We should scarcely conceive that any man could deliberately commit such flagrant impiety, as that of which king Jehoiakim was guilty, in destroying those prophecies which he believed to have proceeded from Almighty God. It does not appear that Jehoiakim doubted of the inspiration of Jeremiah: yet, because he did not like the subject of his prophecies, he cut them in pieces, and burned them in the fire. His folly in this act was as great as his impiety: and we shall find it by no means an uninstructive event, whilst we take occasion from it to notice,

I. The enmity of man's heart against the word of God—

It is not the *act* which we propose to dwell upon, but the *disposition:* the *act* was insulated, and peculiar to this wicked king; but the *disposition* is common to all mankind. The very same disposition may be, and frequently is, evinced in a variety of ways:

1. By denying the Divine authority of the Scriptures—

[Infidels pretend a want of evidence, as the ground of their rejecting the Holy Scriptures: but they wish the Scriptures not to be true, because they wish to hold fast those opinions and practices which the Scriptures condemn. Their own pride and conceit are gratified in finding objections to the Divine authority of the Bible: and they require such demonstrations of it as the subject itself does not admit of. They lay a very undue stress upon some difficulties which they cannot explain; and reject evidences, which would satisfy them on every other subject under heaven. The true ground therefore of their unbelief is, not that there is not evidence enough to satisfy a candid inquirer, but that "they love darkness rather than light; yea, they hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved[a]."]

2. By explaining away all its fundamental truths—

[To reject the Bible altogether would, in the eyes of some, be a shocking impiety; but they will without hesitation discard every mystery contained in it. The doctrine of original sin, and of the total corruption of human nature, they will not admit; but will assert, that man is neither so depraved nor so weak as the Scripture represents him. They are equally adverse to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith: they will have it, that, in bestowing salvation, God has respect to some goodness, either seen or foreseen, in the children of men; and that, in some degree at least, our good works must form the meritorious ground of our salvation. The influences of the Holy Spirit also are derided by them, as visionary and enthusiastic; and instead of looking to the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth, and to sanctify them throughout, they persist in placing some confidence in their own wisdom and their own strength to accomplish the good work in their souls. And their whole study of the Holy Scriptures is directed to this end, to explain away what God has asserted, and to maintain their own errors in opposition to him. But in all this, there is the same disposition exercised as in the

[a] John iii. 19—21.

avowed infidel: and he must be ignorant indeed, who does not know, that in these pretended believers of the Scriptures there is generally found the most acrimonious hostility against the truth itself, and against all who maintain it.]

3. By entertaining doubts of its utility to the poor—

[Would to God that Papists alone had broached this impious sentiment! But, alas! it is found amongst Protestants also: nor are there wanting those who have given it as their decided opinion, that it would have been better for the world if St. Paul had never written one of his Epistles. To put the Scriptures into the hands of the poor, they think highly inexpedient; because they apprehend that the poor are more likely to be led into error by them, than into truth. But what a reflection is this upon God himself, who gave them by inspiration, and declared them to be "profitable for men's instruction in righteousness[b];" and commanded every man to "search" them, in order to the finding of eternal life[c]! To soften down this impious notion, some would select a few parts to circulate among the poor, and would keep back the rest: in other words, they would do exactly what Jehoiakim did; they would cut out page after page, and suffer none to be read which was distasteful to their minds. Jehoiakim was afraid that his people would make a bad use of Jeremiah's roll, and therefore he burned it: and these have the same fears about the greater part of the sacred volume; and therefore they would keep it out of the hands of the poor. The *acts* of the two are different; but their *dispositions* are the same.]

4. By setting its precepts at defiance—

[Strange as it may appear, there are many, who, whilst they believe the Scriptures to be from God, and assent to the doctrines contained in them, are yet determined to go on in sin: they know they are wrong, and perhaps intend at some future period to amend their doings; but proceed they will in their own ways, whatever may be the consequence. The world, the flesh, and the devil have such a hold upon them, that nothing can prevail upon them to seek after God. They despise alike the mercies and the judgments of their God; and say in their hearts, "As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not regard it." In short, they live in the very spirit of Jehoiakim; believing the word to be inspired, and yet "casting it behind them," with a determination to fulfil their own desires in opposition to it.]

5. By reviling and persecuting those who embrace it—

[b] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. [c] John v. 39.

[There is nothing that shews a more rooted aversion to the word of God than this. The next step to the destroying of Jeremiah's roll was, to send for Jeremiah who dictated, and Baruch who wrote it, to destroy them also: for we cannot doubt but that if the Lord had not hidden them, the enraged monarch would have put them to death. And are not multitudes at this day of the very same spirit? Are there not many who hate the faithful ministers of God's word, and account them "the troublers of Israel," and the greatest pests of society? Yes; at this day, as much as in the apostolic age, would Paul and his colleagues be regarded as "the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things[d]."

Nor are ministers alone thus treated: the same hatred extends to all who embrace the Gospel in sincerity, and walk according to its holy precepts: they, no less than their teachers, are called by all manner of opprobrious names, and *that* too solely on account of their fidelity to Christ. Precisely as Abel was hated by Cain for his piety, and Isaac was derided by Ishmael for his faith in God, "so now all who are born after the Spirit are persecuted by those who are born after the flesh[e]." And what does this prove, but that faith itself, and piety too, yea and God himself also, are objects of hatred to the ungodly world; and that the language of their hearts is, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits: and make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us[f]."]

That the same enmity which raged in the king of Judah against the word of God, exists in us, appears most clearly in the foregoing particulars. We now proceed to point out,

II. The folly of indulging it—

Justly is the indulgence of this spirit compared to the setting of thorns and briers in battle array against the devouring element of fire[g]. For,

1. We cannot change one declaration in all the Scriptures—

[We may dispute against every truth in the Bible; but we cannot alter one. We may deny all the scriptural representations of our guilt and helplessness, and of the necessity of being washed in the Redeemer's blood, and renewed by his Spirit; and we may designate them by what terms we will; but they will still continue true: our sophistry may deceive

[d] 1 Cor. iv. 13.
[e] Gal. iv. 29.
[f] Isai. xxx. 9—11.
[g] Isai. xxvii. 4.

both ourselves and others; but it cannot invalidate the truth of God, or induce him to deviate from one word that he has spoken. He will say to us, "What I have written, I have written;" and "sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of my word shall fail." If by disputing against the word of God, or even by casting it into the fire, we could put ourselves into a better situation with respect to it, there would be some excuse for us: but we may as well immure ourselves in a dungeon, and deny the existence of the sun: the sun would still shine, though we should not choose to see it; and would still cheer the hearts of those who felt its refreshing beams, though we excluded ourselves from any participation of its genial influence. So will all the great doctrines of the Gospel continue, though we should shut our eyes against them: "the Scripture cannot be broken;" nor "can our unbelief make the faith of God of no effect[h]." Every thing else is "as grass, which withereth and falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever: and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you[i]."]

2. We cannot prevent the execution of one threatening—

[We are very apt to deceive ourselves in relation to this; and to think, that our unbelief will be an excuse for our disobedience. But error is not innocent, especially when it is wilful: much less can it induce God to reverse all the judgments which he has denounced against sin and sinners. Let us look to fact. The antediluvians scoffed at Noah, and at all his warnings respecting the approaching deluge: but did the deluge not come? or did they escape when the time for executing the threatened judgment was arrived? "Ahab hated and imprisoned Micaiah for not speaking good concerning him, but evil;" and ordered him to be fed "with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, till he should return from the war in peace." But did he return in peace? Did he survive the battle, in which Micaiah had told him he should die? Did his determined opposition to the word of God screen him from the predicted vengeance? Thus will it be with all who disbelieve the sacred records: they will learn too late by their own experience, what they would not believe upon the testimony of God: dying in unregeneracy and unbelief, they will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven, and "the wrath of God will abide upon them[k]." O the folly and madness of plunging ourselves into everlasting misery, when, if we would but turn unto the Lord, we might secure the everlasting enjoyment of his kingdom and glory!]

[h] Rom. iii. 3. [i] 1 Pet. i. 24, 25. [k] John iii. 3, 36.

3. We accumulate on our own heads the judgments which we despise—

[The contempt with which men treat the word of God is itself a great and grievous sin, and adds exceedingly to that load of guilt which we have contracted by all our other offences. How indignant was God with Saul on this account! "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath rejected thee from being king[l]." In like manner, it was no slight expression of his displeasure which he used towards those who, in opposition to his commands, went down into Egypt; "They shall know," says he, "whose word shall stand, mine or theirs[m]." But more particularly mark God's message to king Jehoiakim: to what an ignominious death he was doomed for his impiety; besides that, on the contents of this roll being again written, "*there were added unto them many like words.*" Let it be considered, that, whilst we are setting at nought the word of God, we are not only insuring, but increasing those very "judgments which we puff at," and actually "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Well does God say of all such persons, "Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them[n]?" Let these words then sink down into the ears of all that hear them: if ye persist in saying, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my heart; the Lord's anger will smoke against you, and he will blot out your name from under heaven[o]."]

If now we would know how to conduct ourselves in reference to the word of God, let us LEARN,

1. To tremble at the word ourselves—

[This is the disposition which God approves. He approved of it in king Josiah, under circumstances similar to those in the history before us[p]; and he will look with complacency and delight on all who manifest it in their conduct[q]. O that there might be in all of us such a heart! for if we "receive the word with meekness, we shall find it able and effectual to save our souls."]

2. To use all diligence in making it known to others—

[When Baruch had written the words from Jeremiah's mouth, he went and read them in the ears of all the people. Then he read them also in the presence of the princes: and the princes went and read them to the king. All this was right:

[l] 1 Sam. xv. 23. [m] Jer. xliv. 28. [n] Jer. viii. 9.
[o] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [p] 2 Kings xxii. 8, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20.
[q] Isai. lxvi. 2.

and we should do well to imitate this conduct. To those who possess not the word of God, we should carry it: and as now there are plans for diffusing that word throughout all the world, we should labour, each according to his ability, to advance that blessed work. Moreover we should read it to those who are not able to read; or, at least, should procure them instruction, that they may read it for themselves. Nor should we be afraid to shew our veneration for it in the presence of kings and princes, or to suggest to them the necessity of attending to it themselves.]

3. To deal faithfully with those who pour contempt upon it—

[It is spoken to the reproach of these princes, that though they made intercession to the king not to burn the roll, they did not rend their clothes, either through a fear of God's judgments, or through an abhorrence of his impiety. And truly, when we can see the contempt with which the Holy Scriptures are treated by all around us, and not weep for the dishonour done to God, or for the injury which men do to their own souls, we shew that we ourselves are far from valuing the Scriptures as we ought. "Rivers of tears ran down David's cheeks," when he observed how men transgressed the laws of God: and is there not the same occasion for us to weep? Do we believe indeed that every word of God is true, and feel no pity for those who are exposed to all the curses that are contained therein? O seek a compassionate regard for man, and a holy zeal for God! and let none ever be ashamed to attest this truth, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding[r]."]

[r] Job xxviii. 28.

OUTLINE NO. 1082

DISSIMULATION REPROVED.

Jer. xlii. 20, 21. *Ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you.*

THE office of a minister, if it abound with consolations, abounds with trials and afflictions also. When

he is instrumental to the turning of men to righteousness, and "sees his children walk in truth, he has the sublimest joy" of which, in his present state of existence, he is capable: but to find that he only "labours in vain," and to behold those of whom he had begun to entertain some pleasing hopes, making shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience, is inexpressibly painful: such scenes as these renewed, as it were, in the Apostle's mind, all the pangs of childbirth, so that "he travailed in birth again with his converts, till Christ should be completely formed in them." The Prophet Jeremiah was very unfortunate in this respect: he had at all times to deal with an untoward people; and actually experienced more kindness from the enemies of his nation, than he did from the people unto whom he ministered.

The particular circumstances under which he was at the time referred to in our text, deserve to be considered. Johanan and the captains of the Jewish forces having rescued their countrymen from Ishmael, who was carrying them captive into the land of the Ammonites, were doubting whether to continue in Canaan, where they feared the vengeance of the Chaldeans, or to go into the land of Egpyt, where they hoped to find both safety and abundance. In this strait they applied for instruction to Jeremiah, with apparent sincerity, but (as our text informs us, and the event proved,) with real dissimulation. We propose to consider their conduct,

I. As exemplified in them—

Their dissimulation was indeed most vile and flagrant—

[*In their application to the prophet, there was the greatest expression of piety:* they entreated his prayers to God for them, and promised to follow implicitly whatever direction he should give them from the Lord. They declared most solemnly, that no consideration of ease or interest should induce them to deviate from his injunctions; and they even called God himself to be a witness between the prophet and them, and to visit upon them their iniquity, if they should neglect to perform their promise[a] — — —

[a] Read ver. 1—6.

By the prophet, God returned to them a most gracious answer. He directed them what to do; and encouraged them by the strongest assurances of his own protection; promising to return in mercy to them himself, as well as to dispose the heart of the king of Babylon to shew mercy to them: at the same time he warned them plainly, that if they would follow their own ways in opposition to his counsel, he would bring upon them all the calamities which they were so anxious to escape[b] — — —

They however, by their determined rejection of God's counsel, betrayed in the most open manner their own hypocrisy. Instead of hearkening to God's voice, they, "the proud among them" especially, denied that the message which was delivered to them proceeded from God: they imputed it to the ill-will of Baruch towards them[c]; and told the prophet plainly, that they would not follow his injunctions[d]. Accordingly they, in express violation of their own engagements, went down into Egypt, and there found, as God had declared unto them, "whose word should stand, his or theirs[e]."]

From this view of the history, we are led to make the following remarks:

First, How little do men know of their own hearts!

[In all the professions which they made of their readiness and determination to obey their God, they thought themselves sincere; and doubtless would have been exceedingly indignant, if the prophet had in the first instance charged them with hypocrisy. Thus Peter, when he so vehemently declared, that, though all others should forsake their Lord, he never would, conceived that nothing could ever induce him to recede from his purpose: and thus we also persuade ourselves that we shall prove superior to all temptations, till the time of trial comes, and we shew by our unfaithfulness, how little we knew of our own hearts.]

Next, What an enemy to man's happiness is pride!

[It was "the proud men" in particular who denied the inspiration of the prophet, and who ascribed his message to a conspiracy which he and Baruch had entered into to deceive them. To the same malignant principle of pride does the holy Psalmist ascribe the contempt with which ungodly men treat every thing that relates to God: "The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God[f]." Yes, this is at the root of infidelity: men pretend that there is a want of evidence of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, and

[b] Read ver. 7—19. [c] Jer. xliii. 1—3. [d] Jer. xliv. 16.
[e] Jer. xliv. 28. [f] Ps. x. 4.

exclaim against the Gospel as the invention of priestcraft or enthusiasm: but the truth is, they are too proud to submit to the yoke of Christ, and to receive salvation as the unmerited gift of God.]

Once more;—How awful is the issue of unbelief!

[Plain were the warnings which they received; and bitter was the experience which the unbelieving Jews had of God's fidelity to his threatenings. Thus also it was with the Jews who came out of Egypt, all of whom perished in the wilderness, with the exception of two only. And thus it shall be with unbelievers, whoever they may be: they shall find to their cost, "whose word shall stand, whether God's or theirs." "Their unbelief shall never make the word of God of none effect:" of his word, not one jot or tittle shall ever fall to the ground.]

From this general view of their conduct, let us turn to the consideration of it,

II. As imitated by us—

It may properly be said of all who attend upon the preaching of the Gospel, that they virtually acknowledge the relation that subsists between them and their minister: they look to him as God's ambassador, to declare to them the Divine will respecting them; and they profess their readiness to obey the Divine mandates, whatsoever they may be; and in every instance wherein they are wilfully disobedient, they are, in truth, like the Jews in our text, dissemblers with God. But there are some particular occasions on which our hearers place themselves precisely, as it were, in the same situation with them whose conduct we are considering:

1. Under conviction of sin—

[Those who hear the Gospel faithfully administered, rarely escape without having the word at one time or other brought home to their conscience, and being constrained to make some resolutions of amendment. When such emotions are excited, the heart, which was before stout, is softened; and the ear, which was deaf to all the precepts of the Gospel, becomes opened to receive instruction. On such occasions men will even condescend to request a remembrance in the prayers of their ministers, and to desire instruction relative to the commands of God. Like those on the day of Pentecost, they will cry, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?"

For persons in such a state the faithful minister feels deeply interested: and, whilst he implores the blessing of God upon them, he points out to them the only way of life and salvation. He shews them, that, "if they will be Christ's disciples, they must deny themselves" in reference to all their former lusts and evil habits; that they must "take up their cross daily;" and not only bear with patience the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world, but rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for their Redeemer's sake; and that they must "follow Christ" in the whole of his spirit and conduct, "walking in all things as he walked."

But this, to the generality, appears too strait a path: they reply, as our Saviour's hearers did, "This is an hard saying; Who can hear it?" and like them also, "they go back, and walk no more with us:" thus proving, by their inconstancy, that all their former professions were no better than dissimulation before God. O let those who have "tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," examine their own hearts, and see in what light they are viewed by God, if they have not followed up their convictions, and devoted themselves truly to their Lord and Saviour!]

2. Under some heavy trial or affliction—

[Affliction has a tendency to plough up, as it were, the fallow-ground of man's heart, and to prepare it for the reception of the good seed. The loss of a wife, or husband, or child, or of some friend that was as one's own soul, is often the means of embittering to us all that this world can afford, and of directing our attention to a better world, where alone true happiness can be found. A succession of any other painful events will also produce a similar effect.

Religious company and conversation will, under such circumstances, be not only tolerated, but often desired and delighted in; and the most hopeful appearances of sound conversion will ensue. "They will pour out a prayer, when God's chastening is upon them;" yea, says God, "in their affliction they will seek me early."

But in most cases the impression is but of short duration; and the vows which they made in trouble are soon forgotten. They are like metal taken out of the furnace, which soon returns to its former hardness. Thus it was with the Jews: "When God slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God, &c.; nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, &c.; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant[g]." And

[g] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

thus it is with too many also amongst ourselves; "their goodness is only as the morning dew, and as the early cloud that passeth away."]

3. At the approach of death—

[The most hardened of men are, for the most part, softened at the prospect of death; so that even the most abandoned criminals, under a sentence of condemnation, are thankful for the services of a pious minister, listening eagerly to his instructions, and uniting fervently with him in his prayers. Indeed the common practice of mankind has sanctioned the idea of sending for a minister, to counsel and to pray for the sick and dying.

On those occasions we hear much regret expressed by the generality, on account of the sad neglect of which they have been guilty; and many purposes formed of turning unto the Lord, in case their lives should be prolonged.

But, when such persons are unexpectedly restored to health, how rarely do we find that they fulfil their promises, and devote themselves to God according to their vows! Truly, we need not look to the Jews for examples of dissimulation; for there is not a family, or scarcely an individual, that does not furnish an instance of it amongst ourselves. Human nature is the same in all ages: and wherever pride and unbelief reign, there will be disobedience, obduracy, and ruin.]

Let me now ADDRESS,

1. The disobedient amongst you—

[Consider the relation that subsists between us. As your minister, it is my duty to pray for you, and to declare to you with fidelity the whole counsel of God. Suffer me to ask, how you have improved the opportunities you have enjoyed? If some few have answered the gracious designs of God respecting them, have not the great mass continued in their sinful habits even to this hour, instead of turning truly and unreservedly to the Lord their God? What then have their whole lives been, but one continued course of dissimulation with God? And what must the issue be of such conduct? O, before it is too late, remember how often you have been admonished "not to lean to your own understandings," nor to "trust in an arm of flesh;" but to obey implicitly God's revealed will, and to cleave unto the Saviour with full purpose of heart! The Lord grant that now at last you may become obedient to the faith; and that, instead of being a swift witness against you, I may have you as my joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment!]

2. Those who are hesitating what course to pursue—

[Do not "consult with flesh and blood," but go to the Lord your God, who, if you are upright in your requests, will surely make known his will unto you. The counsel of God's ministers may indeed be asked; but they must no further be followed than they speak agreeably to the written word. That word you are to consult, every one of you for himself; and, if you pray unto God for his Spirit, "he will guide you into all truth." But beware of dissimulation: beware also of delay. Defer not unto the morrow what God requires to be done to-day: but "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness." If you listen to pride and unbelief, you see in the history before us, whither they will lead you. The ungodly world may promise you safety in following their ways; but safety is to be found only in an unreserved obedience to the commands of God, and especially that command of living by faith in his dear Son, and devoting yourselves to him as his redeemed people. "Believe then in the Lord, so shall ye prosper; believe his prophets, so shall ye be established."]

OUTLINE NO. 1083

THE IMPIETY OF UNGODLY MEN.

Jer. xliv. 16, 17. *As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee: but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth.*

ONE would scarcely conceive it possible that human beings should be so depraved as to utter the words which we have just read. Yet, if this be not the language of men's lips at this day, it is, to a very great extent, the language both of their hearts and lives: and one advantage which we derive from the history before us is, that, whilst we see how far the impiety of men will carry them, we learn to form a correct estimate of their conduct. Perhaps in the whole world we should not find one who would justify *them;* though thousands will justify *themselves* in following their example. Permit me, then, to hold up this picture before your eyes, in hopes that, as in

a glass you may recognise your own countenances, and fall under the conviction which your judgment calls for at the hands of others. With this view, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The impiety of that people—

To behold this in its just light, we must look back to the preceding chapters, and mark distinctly,

1. Their voluntary engagements—

[After the King of Babylon had carried the Jews into captivity, he permitted a small remnant to return; and placed over them a governor of their own nation, Gedaliah by name; and to him flocked a considerable number, who had fled to Moab, and Ammon, and Edom, for refuge from the Chaldeans, that they might once more enjoy peace in their own land, under his protection[a]. But Ishmael, who was of the seed royal, envying Gedaliah this honour, conspired against him, and slew him; and then forced the people to follow him, with an intention to deliver them into the hands of the Ammonites[b]. Johanan, a friend of Gedaliah, had suspected Ishmael's intentions; and had offered to defeat them, by secret assassination. And as soon as Ishmael had accomplished his murderous designs, Johanan followed him, and prevailed on the people to return with him. But when he had brought them back as far as Bethlehem, he was afraid of settling there, lest the Babylonish monarch, whose viceroy had been destroyed, should come and wreak his vengeance on him and the people, who had been altogether innocent in the matter: he contemplated, therefore, the seeking a refuge in Egypt, where he thought he should be altogether out of the reach of the King of Babylon[c]. But, being doubtful what the Lord's will respecting it might be (for God had forbidden them ever to return to Egypt[d]), he, at the head of all the people, from the least to the greatest, came to Jeremiah, and intreated him to seek direction from the Lord; and pledged themselves, in the most solemn manner, to obey his voice, whatever it might be, or whatever might be its aspect on their present comfort[e].

Now, in all this, especially I mean in referring the matte to God, Johanan acted in a manner that was truly becoming; for his fears were certainly well grounded; and, in a matter of such difficulty, it became him to request the intercession of God's highly-favoured servant, the Prophet Jeremiah, and to seek, by all possible means, direction from God. But, behold,

[a] Jer. xl. 7—12. [b] Jer. xli. 2, 10. [c] Jer. xli. 17, 18.
[d] Deut. xvii. 16. [e] Jer. xlii. 1—6.

what a sudden change took place in all the people! Instead of fulfilling their engagements, they manifested,]

2. Their deliberate violation of them—

[After ten days, God was pleased to declare, by the prophet, that Johanan and the people must remain in their own land: at the same time assuring them, that he would overrule the heart of the king of Babylon to favour them[f]; but that, if they would go into Egypt, the very evils which they apprehended, should follow them thither, to their utter destruction[g].

Now, viewing their previous and solemn engagements, one would naturally suppose that they would instantly comply with the direction given them. But, instead of that, they deny that God had given any such direction to Jeremiah; and assert, that Baruch had stirred him up to feign this message from the Lord, on purpose to deliver him and all the people into the hands of the Chaldeans[h]; and therefore they would proceed to Egypt, at all events. This purpose they immediately carried into execution; and not only took all the people with them, but forced Jeremiah also, and Baruch, to accompany them thither[i].

A more flagrant act of rebellion than this can scarcely be conceived. Yet behold,]

3. Their self-vindicating effrontery—

[The people, both men and women, but the women more especially, betook themselves to idolatry, and offered incense to the Queen of heaven. Being reproved for this by the prophet, they boldly asserted, that the service of Jehovah had been altogether unprofitable to them; that their former prosperity had arisen from their worship of the Queen of heaven; and their later adversity had resulted from their neglect of her. The truth was, as the prophet told them, the very reverse of this: whilst they had served the Lord, he had prospered them; but when they departed from him to their idols, they had constrained him to follow them with his judgments, even to that very hour. But they were bent upon vindicating themselves and their own ways; and plainly declared to the prophet, that "as for the word which he had spoken to them in the name of the Lord, they would not do it; but would certainly do whatever they themselves chose," however offensive it might be to God, or however injurious to their own interests. They had engaged to worship the Queen of heaven; and her they would worship, whatever God or his prophet might say in opposition to it: for they had found it their interest to serve her; and serve her they would[k].]

[f] Jer. xlii. 12. [g] Jer. xlii. 13—17. [h] Jer. xliii. 1—4.
[i] Jer. xliii. 5—7. [k] ver. 17—19.

Not doubting what your judgment must be respecting *them*, I now proceed to point out,

II. The resemblance that exists between them and us—

Is it asked, Where shall we find any amongst us like *them?* I answer, Look at,

1. The profane sinner—

[See his engagements at the baptismal font: see them voluntarily renewed at the time of his confirmation: all here is well: and if these engagements are adhered to, all will be well, both in time and eternity. But behold, when we call upon them to fulfil their duties, our word, though spoken in the name of the Most High God, has no effect: the generality, if they listen to it for a moment, "take no earnest heed to it:" they hear it "as the word of man only, and not as the word of God." Some will speak out plainly in the very language of our text: and though all arrive not at such a height of impiety as to utter this with their lips, millions all around us declare it by their lives. We call upon them to "renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil;" to "believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith;" and to "keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of their life." But who will regard us? Who will carry into effect any one of their own promises? Who, when called upon to act up to his engagements, does not deny that God has required it at his hands? And who does not even vindicate his own ways, as necessary to his welfare in the world, and as alone conducive to his present happiness? Verily, we may behold in the Jews a just picture of the Christian world; professing all that is good, and determinately following their own evil ways.]

2. The self-righteous formalist—

[Hear him joining in our Liturgy, and you will say, There is a repentant sinner, cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart. But tell him in private what a sinner he is; tell him what contrition becomes him; tell him how entirely he must renounce all self-confidence, and rely solely on the Lord Jesus Christ; and you quite offend him—'He deserves not such heavy judgments: he needs not seek for mercy in this humiliating way. It may be well enough for publicans and harlots to abase themselves in this manner; but *he* needs it not; nor will he consent to accept of mercy on such terms as these.' In vindication of themselves, persons of this description will cast reflections on religion, as depriving men of all happiness, and as a source of all the sorrow and melancholy that are found in the religious world. In vain we tell them,

that it is sin alone which is the cause of sorrow, and ignorance alone that is the source of melancholy to persons seeking after God. In vain we tell them, that religion, properly understood and practised, is a spring of the purest and most lasting joy. The very comparison which the Jews made between Jehovah and the Queen of heaven, these persons will make between true piety and their own formal services: God's ways being condemned as productive only of evil; and their own commended, as replete with good.]

3. The hypocritical professor—

[He, if you will believe his words, is all that you could wish: but if you examine his actions, he is like fruit, fair to look upon, but rotten at the core. Press him on the side of his besetting sins, and you shall find him, in deeds, if not in words, as determined a transgressor as either of the foregoing characters. I know not whether he be not the least hopeful of them all. His very "conscience is seared;" and "even the light that is in him is darkness." Whether his sin be pride, or worldliness, or intemperance, or impurity, he finds excuses for all; or, if self-condemned, "turns the grace of God into licentiousness." Ah! what shall I say to such persons? These, above all, resemble Johanan and the Jews. They make the greatest professions of piety, and sin against the greatest light and knowledge; and cast most dishonour upon God whilst vindicating themselves. Verily, such persons, above all, have need to go along with me in my last consideration; namely,]

III. The certain issue of such conduct—

The Jews would venture upon the line prohibited, and prosecute their own ways, in defiance of the judgments with which they were threatened. But God told them that "they should see whose word should stand, his or theirs[l]."

I ask then, How did it fare with them?

[Did not Divine vengeance follow them? Could Pharaoh afford them the protection which they sought? yea, did not both he and they fall under the Chaldean yoke, and speedily experience all the calamities that had been predicted[m]?]

And how shall it fare with you?

[Is not the time coming when the Lord will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me[n]?" Yes;

[l] ver. 28. [m] ver. 12, 13, 14, 29, 30. [n] Luke xix. 27.

you may vindicate yourselves as you will, and be as confident as you please; but "God's word shall stand, and not yours;" and the day shall surely come, when your pride, and unbelief, and rebellion, shall meet with their deserved recompence at the hands of God — — — It was the boast of the Jews that they had antiquity and authority on their side[o]. But what did it avail them that "they had kings and princes on their side," and that they did nothing but what was done daily "in the streets of Jerusalem?" Did this lessen their guilt, or screen them from punishment? So, then, know ye also, that however broad the way be wherein ye walk, it will lead you to destruction; and that "though hand join in hand, the wicked, how great or numerous soever they be, shall not go unpunished."]

Let me now ADDRESS,

1. Those who disregard our testimony—

[Whether it be in deeds only, or in words also, that ye reject our word, know ye of a truth, that it shall come to pass, and "a difference shall be put between him who serveth God, and him who serveth him not." What this prophet said to those who "refused to be ashamed of their abominations," and to every one of his instructions replied, "We will not hearken," *that* I say to you: "In the day that God shall visit for sin, ye shall be cast down, and perish[p]." You may say, as boldly as you will, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us:" but God laughs at your pride[q]; for "he sees that your day is coming." May God Almighty awaken you from your security, ere it be too late!]

2. Those who tremble at the word of God—

[This is a state of mind which becomes every sinner in the universe[r]. Cultivate it, I pray you, more and more: and, in any engagements which you may enter into with God, undertake nothing in your own strength. Be assured, that of yourselves you can do nothing; and that all your ability, even for the most acknowledged duties, must be from the Lord alone. Yet, whatsoever ye have vowed unto the Lord, remember to pay it: "It were better never to vow, than to vow and not pay." At the same time, take the word of God as your guide: whatsoever He commands you, do it, without considering what its effect may be on your present interests. In an obedient attention to God's will you need fear no evil: for "who is he that shall really harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good[s]?" But, if you will dissemble with God,

[o] ver. 17. [p] Jer. vi. 15—17. [q] Ps. ii. 3, 4.
[r] Isai. lxvi. 2. [s] Jer. xlii. 11, 12. with 1 Pet. iii. 13.

" be sure that your sin will find you out." " Fear not man, therefore, who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

OUTLINE NO. 1084

WE MUST NOT SEEK GREAT THINGS.

Jer. xlv. 5. *Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.*

WORLDLINESS is a great and common evil: and it is often manifested in those from whom we should least expect it. The sons of Zebedee solicited the highest posts of honour in their Master's kingdom, immediately after *he* had been foretelling his crucifixion: and all the disciples disputed about pre-eminence even at the last supper, just after they had been warned, that one of them would betray his Lord. Thus Baruch, when he had been writing in a book all the prophecies of Jeremiah, wherein God's determination to destroy the Jewish nation had been repeatedly declared, was promising himself years of ease and affluence; and was afraid to write another copy of the prophecies, lest the king, who had destroyed the former copy, should put him to death. Jeremiah therefore was ordered by God to reprove him; to tell him what had been the secret thoughts of his heart[a], and to warn him against indulging such an unbecoming spirit[b].

The prohibition in the text being applicable to all in every age, we shall shew,

I. When we may be said to seek great things for ourselves—

In direct reference to the text itself we observe, that this may be said of us,

1. When the objects of our pursuit are great—

[a] ver. 3.

[b] To see this connexion, read the thirty-sixth chapter, and then the forty-fifth, which, in the series of Jeremiah's prophecies, ought to follow it.

[Things are great or small by comparison only; since that which would be great for a peasant, would be altogether worthless in the eyes of a king. But they may universally be called "great," when they far exceed our present condition: and, in that case, an aspiring after them subjects us to the censure in the text. The world indeed universally commend ambition: but worldly ambition is very opposite to the self-denying doctrines of Christianity. It was always discountenanced by our Lord[c]; and is universally reprobated by his Apostles[d]: and, wherever it rules in the heart, it indicates a carnal and worldly mind[e].]

2. When we seek even moderate things with eagerness—

[There is an important distinction to be made between industry, and eagerness: the one relates to the activity of the body; the other to an excessive desire of the mind: the one is not only proper, but necessary, in our respective spheres[f]; the other is universally sinful, when it relates to earthly things. What can our Lord mean by repeating, no less than four times, that solemn injunction, "Take no thought[g]?" Doubtless it is not to be taken literally in the strictest sense: but, allowing for the utmost latitude of interpretation, he must mean, that we should take no *anxious* thought even for the most moderate, or most necessary, comforts. In perfect agreement with this are the directions of his Apostles[h]—: consequently, the indulging of an eager desire after any thing pertaining to this life, exposes us to the reproof contained in the text.]

3. When we seek any thing merely for ourselves—

[We are not at liberty to make *self* in any instance the chief end of our actions. There is One above us, even God, whose honour we should seek, even in the most common offices of life[i]. To be lovers of our own selves is a mark of a reprobate mind[k]: and whatever we do under the influence of such a spirit, whether the action be of a civil[l] or religious[m] nature, it is not acceptable to God. Though therefore we do not aspire after great things, yet, if we seek any thing merely for ourselves, and without any higher end than our own ease, interest, or honour, we are altogether wrong, and deserving of the severest censure.]

[c] Matt. viii. 20. John vi. 15. Matt. vi. 19—21.
[d] Phil. iii. 19. Col. iii. 2.
[e] Rom. viii. 5.
[f] Rom. xii. 11. Eccl. ix. 10.
[g] Matt. vi. 25, 28, 31, 34.
[h] 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6.
[i] 1 Cor. x. 31.
[k] 2 Tim. iii. 2.
[l] Hos. x. 1.
[m] Zech. vii. 5, 6.

To vindicate the reasonableness of this prohibition, we shall proceed to shew,

II. Why we should not seek them—

That the reasons may more distinctly appear, we shall shew,

1. Why we should not make great things the objects of our pursuit—

[An aspiring after riches or honours necessarily supposes that we expect to find happiness in the enjoyment of them. But it is certain that even the whole world (supposing we could possess it) could never make us happy[n]. What folly then is it to be seeking to "fill our belly with the east wind[o]!" Besides, the more we possess of this world, the more we are exposed to temptations. Who does not see that the having the means of gratifying our evil inclinations operates as an inducement to indulge them? and that an elevation of rank or character has a tendency to strengthen the pride of our hearts? Are there not then temptations enough in our way without our seeking to increase them? Shall we "load ourselves with thick clay[p]" when we are about to run a race; or make the way to heaven tenfold more difficult than it is already[q]? They to whom God has given great things, may doubtless enjoy them: but the man who *seeks* them, labours for that which will ultimately involve him in utter ruin[r].]

2. Why we should not seek even moderate things with eagerness—

[No man is eager after any thing but in consequence of the love he feels towards it: his eagerness therefore to it must imply a love of it. Now an attachment to any of the things of time and sense, especially such an attachment as stimulates us earnestly to pursue them, argues a want of true love to God[s]: for to love both God and mammon is impossible[t]. Moreover, such an eagerness shews, that we have no just value for our souls: for if we had once learned to appreciate the soul aright, the whole world would appear as nothing in comparison of it[u]. Will any one then justify a conduct that involves in it such consequences? As long as the love of God,

[n] Luke xii. 15. [o] Job xv. 2.
[p] Hab. ii. 6. [q] Matt. xix. 23, 24.
[r] 1 Tim. vi. 8, 10. Οἱ δὲ βουλόμενοι πλουτεῖν. The *willing* and *desiring* to be rich has this fatal tendency, without any determination to get rich at all events.
[s] 1 John ii. 15. [t] Matt. vi. 24.
[u] Matt. xvi. 26. Phil. iii. 7, 8.

and a care for our own souls, be our bounden duty, so long must the eager pursuit of any earthly vanity be incompatible with the Christian character.]

3. Why we should not seek any thing merely for ourselves—

[We are not our own, but God's. He both formed[x] and redeemed[y] us, that we might glorify his name: and he represents his faithful servants as seeking, *not their own things*, but the things of Jesus Christ[z]. Are we then at liberty to rob God of his glory? and to defeat the great end both of our creation and redemption? Besides, our fellow-creatures also have a claim upon us. We are commanded not to "seek every man his own, but every man another's wealth[a]. Ought we then to deprive them of their right? Doubtless we may without impropriety labour in our respective callings to provide for ourselves and families; but we must take care that, in doing this, we have a view to God's honour, and the general welfare of mankind. Else our labour is mere selfishness, that contracts and hardens our hearts, while it violates every obligation to God and man.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are seeking only the things of this world—

[What have you gained by all your past exertions? You are pleased, perhaps, with your success, and have your pride gratified: but are you really happier than you were before you possessed your present honours and emoluments? Perhaps we may rather ask, Have you not, together with your means of self-indulgence, multiplied also your vexations and disappointments? But supposing you to be unusually favoured in these respects, we still ask, What comfort will these things afford you in the hour of death, and the day of judgment? Will they not *then* at least, whatever they may now do, appear to be lighter than vanity itself? Then in the name of God, "Seek them not."

If however you be determined to seek great things, we will change our voice, and say, "Seek them:" yes, seek them: only take care that they be truly *great*. Be not contented with the poor pitiful things of time and sense: let your ambition rise to the very throne of God, and all the glory of heaven. Seek the favour of God: seek an union with Christ: seek an abiding fellowship with him: seek such discoveries of his love as produce in you a perfect conformity to his image.

[x] Isai. xliii. 21. [y] 1 Cor. vi. 20. 2 Cor. v. 15.
[z] Phil. ii. 21. [a] Phil. ii. 4 and 1 Cor. x. 24.

In pursuit of *such* things, you cannot aim too high; your eagerness cannot be excessive; your very selfishness becomes a virtue. Other things that you acquire, are for yourselves and heirs; *these* shall be for yourselves alone, and that, for ever and ever.]

2. Those who profess to seek higher and better things—

[Many a Baruch is to be found in the house of God: even the people who are truly beloved of the Lord, may need reproof for being too much cumbered about earthly things[b]. If then such a character be present, let him consider the text as applied to himself in particular; Seekest *thou* great things unto thyself? *thou*, who professest to be dead to the world? *thou*, who pretendest to walk in the steps of Christ? *thou*, who boastest that thou hast God for thy portion? How dishonourable is such conduct! O "remember whence thou art fallen; and repent." Remember what was the root of Demas' apostasy[c]; and know that the same root of bitterness, if nourished in your hearts, will bring forth the same malignant and destructive fruit. The best, the only antidote to this poison is, "the love of Christ shed abroad in your hearts[d]." As a sight of the meridian sun unfits our organs of vision for beholding for a time, any inferior objects, so will a sight of Christ efface the beauty of all sublunary things; or, to use the language of inspiration, "by the cross of Christ, the world will soon be crucified unto us, and we unto the world[e]."]

[b] John xi. 5. with Luke x. 41, 42.
[c] 2 Tim. iv. 10.
[d] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.
[e] Gal. vi. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1085

THE MEANS OF TERMINATING WAR.

Jer. xlvii. 6, 7. *O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard; rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea-shore? there hath he appointed it.*

THOUGH the two nations of Judah and Israel were the primary objects of attention to the prophets, yet many other nations were referred to in their prophecies; and the most important events respecting them were circumstantially foretold. The chapter before us relates to the Philistines: and it was written

at a time when they had recovered the power, of which David had deprived them. It foretells the invasion of their land by the Chaldeans, together with the long continuance of the conflict, which should end in the subjugation of them and their allies.

We shall not confine our attention to them, but take the text as expressing generally,

I. The evils of protracted war—

War is a tremendous evil—

[It is so even in its commencement: the distress of the Philistines at the approach of the invading army is very strongly depicted[a]: and doubtless the representation is suited to any other country that is similarly circumstanced — — — What then must be the miseries attendant on a protracted warfare! the desolations must spread far and wide; the slaughters be multiplied; famines be produced; perhaps pestilence also be generated. But who can enumerate the miseries which war brings in its train? — — —]

Well might the prophet desire its speedy termination—

[Humanity alone, independent of patriotic feelings or private interests, would make one desire to see the sword restored to its scabbard. Some who fatten on the spoils of war, or whose ambition is insatiable, may wish to have these fatal contests protracted; but every one who regards either the temporal or spiritual welfare of mankind, will ardently wish for the termination of them. The days described by the prophet will be desired, infinitely beyond any national aggrandizement or personal advancement[b].]

Whilst all acknowledge the evils of war, few seem to be aware of,

II. The reason of its continuance—

War is one of those judgments with which God punishes the sins of men—

[We are apt to look only to second causes, instead of acknowledging, as we ought, *the First Great Cause.* Doubtless the passions of men are the immediate sources from whence the calamities of war arise: and men are strictly

[a] "The men cry and howl:" and the fathers are so terrified and enfeebled, as either to forget their own children, or to be afraid to look back for them. ver. 2, 3.

[b] Isai. xi. 6—9.

amenable, both to God and their fellow-creatures, for the evils, which, by their undue exercise of those passions, they inflict upon the world. But God, who accomplishes his own purposes without at all infringing on the liberty of the human will, renders those passions subservient to his own designs; and employs men as his agents, as a man employs an axe in the execution of any work which he chooses to effect[c]. Man is the instrument; but God is the real author of the work that is done[d].]

Till he has effected his own purposes by it, no human efforts can bring it to a close—

[What are his ultimate designs, is known to himself alone: but whatever "his counsel be, it shall stand; and he will do all his will." He had "given the sword a charge against Ashkelon and the sea-shore; and therefore it *could not* be quiet," till it had executed its commission. He puts a cup into the hand of different nations; and it must go round, till they have all drunk of it. In vain will any refuse it: taste they must, yea and drink too, even to the dregs, if God has so decreed[e]. And, as we ourselves have been his instruments, to carry war to coasts which were, according to human appearances, most secure; so may we have it brought to our own shores, notwithstanding the security we appear to enjoy; and, if "God has so appointed," no power or policy of men will be able to avert the storm: we have partaken largely of the sins of other nations; and we must expect to partake also of their punishments[f].]

But what is impossible with man, is possible with God; who has mercifully declared to us,

III. The means of its termination—

The intention of God's chastisements is to bring us to repentance—

[God has no pleasure in correcting the children of men: on the contrary, "judgment is his strange act," to which with reluctance and difficulty he proceeds. But he tells us plainly, that he will proceed, till he has accomplished his gracious ends; yea that, if we hold fast our iniquities, he will increase his chastisements seven-fold[g]. On the contrary, he promises, that if we humble ourselves before him, he will remove them[h]. When his rod does not produce the desired effect, he com-

[c] Jer. li. 20—23.
[d] Isai. x. 14, 15.
[e] Jer. xxv. 15, 16, 17, 27, 28.
[f] Ezek. xxiii. 31—35.
[g] Lev. xxvi. 27, 28.
[h] Lev. xxvi. 40—24.

plains of us[i], and expresses the deepest regret that we have not suffered him to exercise the mercy which was in his heart towards us[k]. In a word, his message to the whole world is this, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[l]."]

On the attainment of his end, he will instantly remove his judgments from us—

[What an example is given us, in his mercy towards the inhabitants of Nineveh! How did he regard even the humiliation of Ahab, though he knew it to be only external, selfish, and partial[m]! This then is the way to terminate the calamities of war. Sin is, as it were, the target, at which God shoots his arrows. The sword is drawn, "to avenge the quarrel of his covenant:" let that quarrel be composed, and "the sword will be returned to its scabbard; it will rest, and be still."]

Having considered the means of terminating the calamities of war, and of averting the judgments of God from our land, we would, in

CONCLUSION—

Suggest some hints respecting those heavy judgments, which God has denounced against sinners in another world, and respecting the best means of averting them from our souls—

[That the sword has a charge against impenitent sinners, is certain[n]——— nor, however secure they may think themselves, shall they be able to escape it[o]——— "Except they repent, they must all inevitably perish[p]." Moreover, if it be once drawn out against a person in the eternal world, it shall never be returned to its scabbard. Think then whether it have not received a charge against *you*. It is true, you are not mentioned by *name;* but you may be as clearly marked by *character*, as if your very name were specified. Possibly enough your works are such as to determine your state, beyond any possibility of doubt[q]: or, if not, your want of regeneration and conversion may no less clearly mark you as monuments of God's displeasure[r]——— Know then, that in Christ only can you obtain pardon and peace: "There is no other name given, whereby you can be saved." Seek then

[i] Zech. vii. 11, 12. [k] Ps. lxxxi. 13—16. [l] Ezek. xviii. 30.
[m] 1 Kings xxi. 29. [n] Ps. vii. 11—13. and ix. 17. and xi. 6.
[o] Prov. xi 21. [p] Luke xiii. 3, 5. [q] Gal. v. 19—21.
[r] John iii. 3, 5.

" to be found in him:" and know for your comfort, " if your life be hid with Christ in God," it will be out of the reach of God's avenging sword; and " when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory."]

OUTLINE NO. 1086

REPENTANCE DESCRIBED.

Jer. l. 4, 5. *In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.*

THESE words refer to the Jewish people, and to a period yet future. The junction of Israel with Judah took not place in any great degree at the return of the Jews from Babylon; nor was their return signalized by any such piety as is here described. But, at the time ordained of God for their restoration from their present dispersion, the whole Scriptures attest, that a very extraordinary spirit of piety shall be poured out upon them; and that, in the remembrance of all their past sins, they will be filled with the deepest contrition before God[a]. But among the Gentiles, also, will the same holy ardour be expressed in returning to the Lord[b]: and therefore we will not confine our attention either to the one or to the other; but rather regard the words before us as expressive of genuine repentance wheresoever it exists; and as consequently declaring,

I. Our duty—

Of the Jews, it is said, " They shall go and seek the Lord their God."

Now this is a duty,

1. Of universal obligation—

[There is not a man in the universe to whom it does not appertain. There is no man who has not sinned, " in departing from the living God;" and consequently, there is no man

[a] Jer. xxxi. 9. [b] Isai. ii. 3.

who does not need to seek his favour, and to implore mercy at his hands. The king upon the throne is not so elevated, but that he needs to turn to God in this way: nor is the meanest subject in his realm so insignificant, as that this can be dispensed with at his hands.]

2. Of prime and indispensable importance—

[There are many duties binding upon all, and all important in their place: but this is "the one thing needful;" the one thing, without which no man can have peace with God, or peace in his own conscience, or any hope of happiness in the eternal world.]

But in this passage we see also,

II. The manner in which it should be performed—

We must all seek the Lord,

1. With deep humiliation of soul—

[The Jews will look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. But if they were the agents in the crucifixion of our Lord, our sins were the procuring cause; yea, and we have even "crucified the Son of God afresh," by continuing in our sins. And who amongst us has not also "done despite unto the Spirit of grace," "resisting" his sacred motions, till we have even "quenched" them in our souls? It is not, surely, necessary that we should have committed flagrant acts of immorality, in order to call for humiliation before God: the whole state of our souls, from the first moment of our existence to the present hour, shews how totally we have fallen from God, and what contrition becomes us in our return to him. The man that thinks a less measure of shame and sorrow becomes him, because he has not been guilty of any atrocious crime, has yet to learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the desert of every child of man before God. Methinks it is scarcely necessary to remind you, that you must "sow in tears, if you would reap in joy; and that they only who go on their way weeping, bearing precious seed, can ever hope to come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them[c]."]

2. With diligent inquiries after the way of life—

[The Jews, dispersed throughout the world, will have to make many inquiries, when once they have set out towards the promised land. And we also, at this time, need to "ask the way towards Zion," even after "our faces are directed

[c] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

thitherward." There is but one way, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ; who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." But we do not readily find that way: we have many paths which nature points out, and which we greatly prefer: we would come to God in a way of self-righteousness and self-dependence, instead of relying solely and exclusively on the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, at our first seeking after God, there will arise many doubts respecting the precise path in which it is our duty to proceed, and in relation to which the more experienced Christian may be well qualified to instruct us. To avail ourselves of all possible information, is our wisdom; and especially to seek direction from God in prayer: and it is in answer to such inquiries only that we can hope to "hear a voice behind us, saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it."]

3. With a fixed determination of heart to give ourselves unreservedly unto God—

[This is implied in entering into covenant with God. A man may make a promise, which yet he has no deliberate determination to keep: but if he enter into a solemn covenant with God, as Josiah did[d], he shews that he is altogether in earnest, and that he is engaged in a transaction which it is his solemn purpose "never to forget." In this way should every penitent approach his God; solemnly giving up himself to him in his secret chamber; and openly also, at the table of the Lord; from henceforth renouncing all other lords, and cleaving only to his God and Saviour, in newness of heart and life. In truth, the real penitent will not be content to go to heaven alone. He will propose to those around him to unite in the blessed work in which he has engaged. In perfect accordance with the Church of old, he says, "Draw *me;* and *we* will run after thee:" that is, 'Draw *me*, O God; and I will never willingly come to thee alone.']

And now let me ASK,

1. Who amongst you are inclined to make this proposal?

[Verily, there is a sad want of zeal, even in multitudes of whom, in the judgment of charity, we should say, They are in the way to heaven. We do not find that holy boldness for the Lord, which every penitent should feel; nor that compassion for man, which a just sense of our own danger would naturally inspire. We affect prudence; or, in other words, we shun the cross which a more decided conduct would bring upon us. But so did not St. Paul, or any of the saints of

[d] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31.

old. They imparted to others the light they had received; and sought to introduce others to the Saviour whom they had found[e]. Let us go and do likewise: and if this zeal will characterize the piety of the latter day, let it not be found wanting in the religion which we profess.]

2. Who amongst you would accede to it, if made?

[We wish to lower the standard of true repentance. 'Surely, a less measure of humiliation will suffice for *me;* nor can such diligence and self-devotion be required of *me.*' But that which will be the duty of men in the latter day, must be our duty now: and therefore settle it in your minds, that we must be wholly for God, if we would obtain favour at his hands; and that, "whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we must," if we would succeed, "engage in it with all our might."]

[e] John i. 35—45.

OUTLINE NO. 1087

GOD'S MERCY TO HIS PEOPLE.

Jer. l. 20. *In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.*

THE promises of God in his word are said to be "exceeding great and precious[a]:" and, in truth, they are so great, that we are apt to feel a jealousy respecting them, as though they were not sufficiently guarded: they are apt to appear to us too free, too full, too unqualified, too fixed. Hence we would clog them with limitations and conditions: we would confine them to objects in whom should be found some antecedent worthiness, and suspend the performance of them upon the faithfulness of man. I mean not, by this observation, to say, that great caution is not to be used in *the application* of them to *individual persons;* for I well know, that men may easily deceive themselves respecting *their own personal interest* in them: but I mean to say, that God's blessings are his own; that he has a right to confer

[a] 2 Pet. i. 4.

them on whomsoever he will; and that he both does, and will, bestow them according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, without respect to any previous goodness in man, or any dependence on man's strength for the performance of conditions previously imposed upon him. See to whom the promise in my text is made. It is made to the Jewish people, in their present dispersion. For, if we suppose it to have been *in part* accomplished by the two tribes renouncing idolatry upon their return from Babylon, yet it can be *only in part* that it can have been fulfilled at that time; because it is evident that, since the return of the Jews from Babylon, "their sins have been found," and visited too, in wrathful indignation, for many hundreds of years. At a period, however, that is fast approaching, God's elect among them shall be restored to his favour, and be made partakers of everlasting felicity in his immediate presence.

In considering these words, I shall notice,

I. The extent of God's mercy to his chosen people—

God's people are constantly represented as a remnant—

[Such they have been in all ages of the world; and at different periods they have been "a very small remnant:" but, whether more or less numerous, they are, as the Apostle calls them, "a remnant according to the election of grace[b]." It is, in fact, for the sake of God's elect that are yet unborn, that the wickedness of many who are now living is endured. God says, respecting many a corrupt and worthless plant, "Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it[c]."]

For them, however, God designs the richest mercy—

[When he returns unto them in mercy, which, at his appointed period, he will do, he will vouchsafe to them blessings far beyond any that he conferred upon his people of old. To those who approached him with their sacrifices, he dispensed a pardon for some sins only, and *that* only till the time should come for a renewal of the same sacrifices: but to his remnant who believe in Christ, and seek acceptance through his all-

[b] Rom. xi. 5. [c] Isai. i. 9. and lxv. 8.

atoning sacrifice, he imparts a full and perfect remission of all sin; so that, whatever iniquity they may have committed in their unconverted state, it shall be altogether and for ever cancelled: "it shall be blotted out, even as a morning cloud," which passes over the earth, and is seen no more; and it shall be "cast behind God's back[d]," never to be seen again; and "into the very depths of the sea[e]," from whence it shall never be recovered. In a word, he *covenants with them* to "remember their sins no more;" so that, whoever may "search for them, they shall be found no more" for ever[f]. God will henceforth view them, not as they are in themselves, but as they are in Christ, "without spot or blemish[g]." Clothed in his perfect righteousness, they are presented faultless before God, and they are so regarded by God himself to their exceeding joy[h]."]

In further noticing this glorious promise, I must proceed to mark,

II. The interest which the Jews have in it—

We ought not to overlook this; which is, in fact, the direct object which God himself has in his view—

[It is evidently spoken respecting the Jews: and though we do right in applying it to God's elect people generally, we do exceeding wrong in overlooking those to whom it primarily belongs. We are ready to think that the conversion and salvation of the Jews is a subject in which we have no interest: and on this account, we almost grudge the mention of it in a Christian assembly. On the conversion of the Gentiles we are at liberty to expatiate: but a few words on the restoration of God's ancient people will be deemed more than sufficient, unless the particular occasion demand for it a distinct and formal consideration. But we err exceedingly in this, and cast a veil over numberless prophecies, which, if duly explained, would open to us all the mysteries of God's love, to the very end of time.]

As applied to the Jews, the promise should fill us with unutterable joy—

[It is plain that it primarily belongs to them. And should it not be an occasion of joy to us to reflect, that amongst them God has a remnant, "whom he has reserved for himself," and to whom the promise in my text will be fulfilled in its utmost extent? I call upon you, then, to contemplate this blessed event; and to hasten forward, by all

[d] Isai. xxxviii. 17. [e] Mic. vii. 19.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 31—34. with Heb. x. 14—17. [g] Eph. v. 27.
[h] Jude, ver. 24.

possible means, the destined period. Even supposing that their national conversion were not near at hand, I should say, it is nearer than it was in the Apostle's days; and that if he, at that distant period, laboured to the utmost to turn to the faith of Christ the remnant of God's hidden ones among them, much more should we do it now: and therefore I commend to you this part of my subject, as deserving at all times the deepest attention[i] — — —]

But that we may bring home the promise to ourselves, let us consider,

III. The effect which the contemplation of it should produce on us—

Have we any hope that we are of the number of God's elect? Let the thought of his promised mercy fill us with,

1. Humiliation—

[Can we reflect a moment on the thought that *our* sins are thus blotted out, and not stand amazed at the riches of God's sovereign grace? Truly, we should be altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise: and the more assured our hope is, that God has forgiven us, the more determined we should be never to forgive ourselves. We should go softly all our days, in the remembrance of our sins; and should "lothe ourselves for our abominations," in proportion as we hope that "God is pacified towards us[k]."]

2. Gratitude—

[What bounds should there be to our thankfulness before God? Methinks our language day and night should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" This, at all events, we should do: we should shew our indignation against sin, which is so hateful in his eyes; and take occasion from his mercies to devote ourselves to him in a way of holy and unreserved obedience[l].]

3. Affiance—

[St. Paul well says, "If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The same conclusion would I draw from that perfect forgiveness which God vouchsafes to his believing people: Has he so blotted out our iniquities, and

[i] If this be a *Sermon for the Jews*, it should here be shewn that the time then present was peculiarly proper for a fuller consideration of the subject.

[k] Ezek. xvi. 63. [l] Rom. xii. 1.

will he refuse us strength to resist and mortify sin in future? Has he rescued us thus from all the powers of darkness, and will he again suffer them to pluck us out of his hands? No: we may ask with confidence, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect," or condemn so much as one of his believing people? In all that he has done, in redeeming us from death, he has given us a pledge of what he will hereafter do; and never will he suffer any one to "separate us from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord[m]."]

[m] Rom. viii. 32—39.

OUTLINE NO. 1088

GOD'S MERCY CONTRASTED WITH OUR SINFULNESS.

Jer. li. 5. *Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of Hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.*

THE peculiar people of God in their most afflictive circumstances have a sure prospect of a happy deliverance. But his enemies in their most prosperous state are only like beasts fattening for the slaughter. The Jews were reduced to the lowest ebb of misery in Babylon, on account of their multiplied iniquities: yet did God promise to restore them to their native land. On the contrary, the Babylonians, who were exalted to the highest pitch of grandeur, were in due time to be altogether extirpated. Both these events were foretold by the prophet in this and the preceding chapters: and, in the text, he appeals to the Jews that *they* had not been forsaken, notwithstanding the abundant cause they had afforded for an utter dereliction—

From these words we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The provocations we have given to God,

1. In our national capacity—

[All "sin," of whatever kind, is properly and primarily "against the Holy One of Israel[a]." Now there is no sin, whether against the first or second table of the law, which has

[a] Ps. li. 4.

not abounded in this land — — — Nor is there any rank or order of men, from the highest to the lowest, that have not yielded up themselves as willing servants to sin and Satan — — — Even the flock of Christ itself, both the pastors who watch over it, and the people who compose it, have contributed in no small degree to the tremendous mass of iniquity, that has incensed our God against us — — —]

2. In our individual capacity—

[Since a sight of others' sins rarely begets any true humiliation in us, let each of us in particular search out his own. Let our thoughts, words, and actions be strictly scrutinized. Let those sins which are more immediately against God, be inquired into; our pride, our impenitence, our unbelief, our ingratitude for temporal blessings, and especially for the unspeakable gift of God's dear Son; our obstinate resistance of God's Holy Spirit, together with all our neglect of duties, or our coldness in the performance of them; let these be counted up, and be set in order before us; and the very best of men will see cause for the deepest humiliation; yea, we shall wonder that we have not long since been made like to Sodom and Gomorrha.]

Having taken a view of our sins, let us contrast with them,

II. The mercies God has vouchsafed to us—

Justly have we deserved to be entirely abandoned by our God—

[The history of the Jews shews us what we oursolves deserve. He himself bids us go to Shiloh, and see what he did to it for the wickedness of his people[b]. Indeed the whole of his dealings with them in their Assyrian and Babylonish captivity, and in their present dispersion, may teach us what we might well expect at his hands — — —]

But he has not dealt with us according to our desert—

[He has "not forsaken us" *as a nation*. In proof of this, we appeal to the comparative lightness of our troubles—the signal interpositions with which we have been favoured in the midst of our troubles—and lastly, the happy termination of them, by a seasonable restoration both of peace and plenty[c].

Nor has he forsaken us *as individuals*. He is yet calling us by his word, and striving with us by his Spirit. And we behold

[b] Jer. vii. 12. with 1 Sam. iv. 10, 11.

[c] October 4, 1801, on a Thanksgiving for peace and plenty.

amongst us the evident tokens of his presence, in that sinners are yet awakened to repentance, and saints are edified in faith and love.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let the long-suffering of God be gratefully acknowledged—

[We should "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation[d]." Let us not, however, rest in carnal mirth; but let his temporal mercies to our land, and his spiritual mercies to our souls, call forth our liveliest gratitude and our devoutest praise.]

2. Let it also be practically improved—

[In the words immediately following our text, the prophet says, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his own soul." It was the duty of the Jews to cast off their bondage as soon as God should open a way for their escape. Thus must we also cast off the servitude in which we have been detained, and go forth from amongst all the enemies of God. If we continue in sin, we must take our portion with the ungodly. But if we give up ourselves unreservedly to God, he will blot out our past iniquities in the blood of his Son, and make us partakers of an everlasting salvation.

[d] 2 Pet. iii. 15.

OUTLINE NO. 1089

DUTY OF ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S MERCIES.

Jer. li. 10. *Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God!*

THE prophets, whilst foretelling future events, are often transported in spirit to the period of which they speak; and are enabled to see, as it were, the events themselves actually passing before their eyes. Hence, if they speak of the rise or fall of kingdoms, they behold the armies marching to their destination, engaging in the conflict, and either conquering or conquered, according as the Governor of the universe has fore-ordained. This is peculiarly manifest in relation to the destruction of Babylon; which is more frequently and more fully predicted than any other event, except those which immediately relate to

God's chosen people[a]. It is of that event that the prophet speaks in the chapter before us, as he has also done in the preceding chapter. Having said in the foregoing verses that God would "send fanners to Babylon, to fan," to destroy her, though the event was not to take place for sixty years, yet he says, "This is the time of the Lord's recompence;" and then exclaims, "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed! howl ye for her!" He then speaks of the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity as already effected, and calls on them to declare in Zion the wonders which God had wrought for them: "The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness (that is, our *deliverance*): come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God."

It is not of future events that we are now called to speak, but of things accomplished, as it were, before our eyes, and of things that demand our most grateful acknowledgment.

Let us consider,

I. What is that work which we are now called to declare—

At no period of our history had we ever more reason to bless and adore our God than at this day[b]. The mercies vouchsafed to us have been exceeding great and numerous. We cannot enter into them indeed very fully; but we will suggest some distinct heads, under which they may be arranged for your own more easy and profitable contemplation of them. Consider them then as *agricultural* and *commercial*, *political* and *religious*. Consider,

1. The agricultural—

[Heavy was the pressure on all the lower orders of society, by reason of the dearness of provisions, throughout the last year: and, if the late harvest had been as unproductive as that which preceded it, their distress would have been at this hour exceeding great. But God in his mercy vouchsafed to us a

[a] See the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Isaiah throughout, and especially chap. xiv. 4—12.

[b] This was preached on Jan. 13, 1813.

very abundant harvest, so that now all may "eat and be satisfied, and bless the name of their God." True it is, that other things still continue at a high price: but that very circumstance only shews us the more forcibly, how rich a mercy it is to have plenty of that which is "the staff of life." In enumerating then the mercies for which we have now peculiar reason to be thankful, let us not be unmindful of that in which the great mass of the community are so deeply interested, and which is perhaps the first of all national blessings.]

2. Commercial—

[To abridge and to destroy our commerce has been the incessant labour of our enemies: and to such a state was it reduced, that it could scarcely be carried on to any extent, without involving all the persons engaged in it in the guilt of perjury. The whole continent almost was closed against us: and whatever was surreptitiously introduced there, was subjected to such peril, as to prove a most serious discouragement to all commercial enterprise. But now, within these few weeks only, the whole continent is anxious to receive our goods: our manufactures are revived; our people, who during the last year were almost in a state of insurrection on account of the want of work, are employed; and a good prospect is opened to us of increased and permanent prosperity. This, whether viewed in its aspect on individuals or the nation at large, is another blessing, which ought on no account to be overlooked.]

3. Political—

[Who that looks back to the earlier period of the French Revolution, and recollects what sentiments of insubordination and sedition pervaded the land, must not be surprised at the change that has taken place in relation to those things? Formerly the cry of liberty and equality was raised in almost every place, to instigate the people to throw off all submission to the Government: and such was the delusion by which the minds of many were blinded, that thousands were panting to destroy the constitution, and to establish a democracy in its place. The same bloody scenes as took place in France were preparing for this land also; and so great and general was the infatuation, that many, even of religious characters, were ready to help forward the designs and efforts of those who sought our ruin. But now the excellence of our constitution is duly appreciated; the persons who were once ready to subvert it have now seen their error; and perhaps there is scarcely a man in the land who would not willingly die in its defence. Nor is this change peculiar to us: it is now seen in every part of Europe; and those very people who banished their former Rulers, and overturned all their former establishments, are now desirous of returning

to the state they have forsaken, and are actually fighting for the restoration of their former Governments. Thus has order taken the place of anarchy, and respect for constituted authorities banished from amongst us the demon of discontent.]

4. Religious—

[With a contempt for all ancient institutions, there went forth an utter disregard of Revealed Religion. Infidelity stalked abroad, as it were, at noon-day. It no longer blushed to shew its face, but obtruded itself upon the attention of all; and reviled, as enemies to sense and reason, all who dared to maintain the cause of God in the world. Philosophy forsooth was deemed a safer guide than the voice of inspiration; and the word of God itself was held up to ridicule, as a composition of falsehood and absurdity. How different is the state of things amongst us at this time! The Holy Scriptures are revered and honoured to a degree altogether unprecedented and unknown in this country. All ranks and orders of men amongst us not only receive the sacred volume as true, but stand forth to advocate its cause, and to extend the knowledge of it to every quarter of the globe. If we judged from the zeal exerted for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, we should be ready to think that the Millennial period were already come. But, though we cannot yet congratulate ourselves on such an extensive change as this, we nevertheless behold a most astonishing increase of true religion in the land. We are happy too to declare, that a similar spirit is rising in other lands; and that, "whilst God's judgments have been poured out so awfully and so extensively upon the earth, the inhabitants thereof have been learning righteousness[c]."

These then are mercies which may well "be declared in Zion," and which we are now called in a more especial manner to commemorate.]

Having drawn your attention to some of those mercies which deserve especial notice at this time, I proceed to shew,

II. In what manner we should declare them—

Since these mercies are so great and numerous, let us all unite in IMPROVING them as we ought to do:

1. Let us acknowledge God in them—

[Who is it that "hath wrought all these deliverances for us?" Is it our own hand, our own arm, that hath effected them? Who is it that gave us such a rich abundant harvest?

[c] Isai. xxvi. 9.

We must be blind indeed, if we see not the hand of God in it[d]——— Who is it that hath opened all the ports of the continent to our manufactures? Backward as men are to trace the operation of God in such things, there is scarcely a person in the land that does not say, "This is thine hand; and thou, Lord, hast done it[e]!" And must we not trace the revolution of sentiment to the same source? Who but God can "still the madness of the people?" It is he, and he alone, that "turneth the heart, whithersoever he will[f]." Above all, to whose agency must we refer that great work of dispelling the clouds of infidelity, and of making his light to shine into the hearts of men? Truly, none but He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" at the first creation of the world, is sufficient for these things[g]. In reference then to every thing that has been done for us, we must say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the praise!"]

2. We must adore him for them—

[It is not a cold and speculative acknowledgment only that we are called to make: our hearts should be warmed with a sense of God's mercies: and our lips be devoutly occupied in his praise. The first effect indeed which they should have upon our minds is, to fill us with wonder and admiration of the Divine goodness[h]: but when we have, as it were, recovered from the overwhelming sense of his goodness, then should we declare it, and publish it with all the powers of our souls. Look at David, when recounting the mercies God had vouchsafed to Israel[i]: such is the language which well befits us on the present occasion; yea, we should "make our boast in God all the day long, and praise his name for ever and ever[k]." In this way "we must declare his work, if we would wisely consider of his doing[l]."]

3. Let us, by anticipation, bless God for the yet richer mercies which he has in reserve for us—

[We began with observing, that "the deliverance" from Babylon was yet distant, at least sixty years, though the prophet spoke of it as already accomplished. So may we look forward to the blessings which are made over to us by the sure word of promise, and may even now bless God for them as though they were already possessed. As Abraham rejoiced at the prospect of the day of Christ, just as if he had actually

[d] Hos. ii. 8. Ps. lxv. 9—13.
[e] Ps. cix. 27. and xliv. 3. Isai. xlv. 7.
[f] Prov. xxi. 1. Ps. lxv. 7.
[g] 2 Cor. iv. 6. and v. 5.
[h] Ps. xl. 5.
[i] Ps. xcviii. 1—8.
[k] Ps. xliv. 7, 8.
[l] Ps. lxiv. 9.

seen it with his eyes, so *may* we do, and so we *ought* to do, in reference to his future advent to reign on earth. Then will peace and plenty, and truth and righteousness, prevail throughout the world. Then shall men "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and they will learn war no more." Then "Judah will no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah," but all will "sit harmonious and contented under their own vine and fig-tree." "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid:" nor shall any hurt or destroy in God's holy mountain. Then, whilst plenty abounds in every place[m], "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." O what a day of wonders will that be! It is our privilege to look forward to it, and even to see it now, as it were, before our eyes. See how the prophet, who lived almost three thousand years ago, beheld it, and gloried in the sight[n]! and shall not we, who are almost on the very eve of that day? We have no doubt but that all these events, which have been taking place in the world these twenty years, are preparing the way for the promised advent of our Lord. Let us then anticipate it with joy and gratitude[o]: let us adore our God for giving such prospects to sinful man: and let us endeavour to hasten it forward by every possible exertion in the cause of Christ.]

[m] Amos ix. 13—15. [n] Isai. xlix. 12, 13. and lx. 1, 4, 8.
[o] Isai. lii. 9, 10.

LAMENTATIONS.

OUTLINE NO. 1090

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT REMEMBERING OUR LATTER END.

Lam. i. 9. *She remembereth*[a] *not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully.*

TO men in general nothing appears sinful but that which violates in the grossest manner some positive command, and interrupts in a very high degree the welfare of society. But God considers an unprofitable servant as meriting the same doom as the dishonest; and informs us, that an unmindfulness of our latter end will bring his judgments upon us, no less than a determined commission of every thing that is evil.

The Prophet Jeremiah is lamenting the sore bondage under which his country groaned in Babylon, and is assigning the reasons for which God had thus rejected her. But in doing this, he does not fix on any one particular sin, however great; but on that which had pervaded all ranks of people, their unmindfulness of their latter end.

In his words we read,

I. Their sin—

This is the common sin of all mankind—

[Moses had forewarned the Jews of the things that should come upon them in the latter days: but they had never duly considered his predictions, nor laboured to avert the threatened calamities. Thus has God warned us also of the miseries which the wicked shall endure in another world: but we will

[a] It should rather be, *remembered*.

not regard his admonitions. The gay, the worldly, the ambitious, are intent on their several pursuits; but none says "Where is God my Maker[b]?" Even those who profess some regard for religion, are yet, for the most part, very little engaged in a preparation for eternity: their zeal, in the pursuit of heavenly things, bears no proportion to the importance of their object, or even to the labours which others use for the attainment of worldly vanities.]

Nor let this be thought a venial matter—

[This it was, which brought down Jerusalem: and it will involve us also in the heaviest calamities. And well it may: for it is *a contempt of God our Maker.* In this view he himself complains of it[c]; and he represents all his attributes and perfections as dishonoured by it[d]. It is also *a contempt of Christ our Saviour.* He had even "died, to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" but, by our indifference, we make light of his mercies[e], and trample on his blood[f]. Finally, it is *a contempt of our own souls.* The most avowed enemies of God and his Christ profess to have some regard for their immortal souls: but God, who will not put a wrong construction upon our actions, tells us, that "he who refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul[g]." Indeed this is but too manifest; since the man who remembers not his latter end, practically says, 'Give me the things which my body most affects; and, as for my soul, I care not for it: if my soul can be saved, notwithstanding my indulgence of the body, it is well: but if their interests clash, I will gratify my body, though at the peril, yea, to the certain destruction, of my soul.'

Can that then be light and venial, which involves in it such awful consequences? Surely, though no flagrant crime were ever committed, this alone would be sufficient to bring upon us God's eternal wrath and indignation.]

The evil of such conduct will abundantly appear, if we notice,

II. Their punishment—

The downfall of Jerusalem was a fit emblem of that which awaits impenitent transgressors—

[Let us only compare the departure of Israel out of Egypt, guided, protected, and supported by God himself,

[b] Job xxxv. 10. Ps. xiv. 2, 3. [c] Ps. x. 4—6, 11, 13.

[d] His majesty, Ps. xii. 4; his omniscience, Job xxii. 13, 14; his justice, Ps. xciv. 7; his goodness and forbearance, Rom. ii. 4.

[e] Luke x. 16. [f] Acts xiii. 38—41. Heb. x. 28, 29.

[g] Prov. xv. 32.

and their establishment and increase in the land of Canaan, with their miserable condition when they were carried captive to Babylon: "How was the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!" Thus wonderful will be our destruction also, if we continue to forget our latter end.]

God himself warns us that our destruction will be great if we neglect our souls—

[It will be *sudden*[h] — — — *tremendous*[i] — — — *irremediable*[k] — — — and *eternal*[l] — — —

Let us reflect on the change experienced by the Rich Man in the parable[m]; and we may conceive a little of that surprise and horror that will seize on us in the instant of our departure from the body.

Let us also, if we would escape this doom, regard the solemn warning, and the compassionate advice, which God himself has recorded for our instruction[n].]

We may IMPROVE this subject yet further,

1. For the warning even of real Christians—

[We will suppose that your concern for your souls is such as to secure eternal happiness: yet a declension in holy zeal will produce a proportionable declension both in your graces and your comforts[o]. Let those who have ever experienced the blessedness of living nigh to God, and of being on the wing for heaven, compare it with the darkness and misery of a drooping and deserted state; and they will see enough to make them watchful against spiritual decays, and increasingly mindful of their eternal interests.]

2. For their comfort and encouragement—

[There is a truth, not expressed indeed, but evidently implied in the text, namely, That all who remember their latter end, shall be wonderfully exalted. And what an encouraging truth is this. Let any one view Lazarus at the Rich Man's gate, and in Abraham's bosom[p], and he will see what a wonderful exaltation awaits the righteous at their departure hence. Even *here* the children of the devil, as soon as ever they believe in Christ, become "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty[q]:" but *hereafter* they shall reign with him as partners of his glory[r]. Let this hope then animate the Christian in his difficulties, and stimulate us all to more abundant diligence in our heavenly calling[s].]

[h] Ps. lxxiii. 17—20. 1 Thess. v. 3. [i] Jer. xxiii. 17—20.
[k] Prov. xxix. 1. [l] 2 Thess. i. 7—9. [m] Luke xvi. 19, 23.
[n] Deut. xxxii. 18, 20, 29. [o] Ps. xxx. 7. Cant. v. 2—6.
[p] Luke xvi. 20—22. [q] 2 Cor. vi. 18.
[r] Rom. viii. 17. [s] 1 John iii. 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1091

THE VIEWS OF A SAINT IN HIS AFFLICTIONS.

Lam. iii. 22, 23. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

IT is in affliction chiefly that the children of God attain to any considerable eminence in religion. By trouble, they are led to realize their principles; and to seek at the fountain-head those consolations which the broken cisterns of this world are no longer able to supply. If David had never been an object of persecution to his enemies, we may well doubt whether he would ever have soared as he did in heavenly contemplations, or evinced such transcendent piety as glows throughout his Psalms. Jeremiah was a man deeply conversant with trouble; as he says: "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath[a]." But what sublime lessons does he teach us in the words which we have just read! Truly we may see in these words,

I. The views of a saint under affliction—

A man undisciplined in the school of affliction pores over his troubles, and thereby greatly disquiets his own soul. But a man who is taught of God will have his mind very differently occupied. He will delight rather in contemplating,

1. The lightness of his affliction, in comparison of his deserts—

[Who, that calls to mind the multitude of his past transgressions, must not justify God in all his dispensations, however painful they may be to flesh and blood? "Shall a living man complain, (he will say,) a man for the punishment of his sins[b]?" No: he will acknowledge that hell itself is his proper portion; and that any thing short of that is far "less than his iniquities have deserved[c]." Instead, therefore, of complaining, like Cain, that "his punishment is greater than he can bear[d]," he will say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not utterly consumed, even because his compassions fail not."]

[a] ver. 1. [b] ver. 39. [c] Ezra ix. 13. [d] Gen. iv. 13.

2. The multitude of the mercies yet continued to him—

[An ungodly man, because he is bereaved of some comforts, will overlook all the others which he is still privileged to possess. But a real saint will think how much worse his state might have been, and how many blessings are still continued to him. He will say, My troubles are few; but my mercies are greatly multiplied: "they are new every morning." His rest by night, his comforts by day, and, above all, his constant access to God in prayer, and the rich communications of grace and peace received from him, *these* things, I say, will fill him with holy gratitude, and turn all his sorrows into joy.]

3. The unchangeableness of God under all his dispensations—

[The saint will not regard God as an arbitrary Governor, that orders every thing from caprice; but as a covenant God, who has engaged to provide for his people whatever may conduce to their best interests. Hence, under the pressure of his troubles, he will call to mind that God has said, He would "correct his people in measure, and not leave them altogether unpunished[e]." In this view, he acknowledges that "God in very faithfulness has afflicted him[f]." Indeed, the faithfulness of God is that which, in such seasons, he contemplates with peculiar delight: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God[g]."]

In opening to you these views, I wish particularly to mark,

II. The beauty of religion as displayed in them—

Philosophy will do much to produce a resignation to the will of God. Indeed, common sense teaches us that it is in vain to murmur and repine at our troubles, and that the more patiently we bear our trials, the more we diminish their force. But the views which we have been considering, produce far more exalted effects. Behold,

1. How they compose the mind—

[You see in this afflicted saint a meek submission, far different from any that philosophy can produce. Behold how

[e] Jer. xxx. 11. [f] Ps. cxix. 75.
[g] Ps. xlii. 5, 11. and xliii. 5. *thrice.*

he kisses the rod, and blesses the hand that smites him; and sees nothing but mercy, where an ungodly man would have noticed nothing but severity and wrath. Thus "he enjoys a light in the midst of darkness[h];" and realizes the parable of Samson; "Out of the eater he brings forth meat, and out of the strong he brings forth sweet."]

2. How they elevate the soul—

[Behold the prophet, how he soars above *self*, and rises superior to all the dictates of *sense!* He forgets, as it were, his trials, in the contemplation of his mercies; and overlooks the chastisement, by reason of the love from whence it proceeds. This is a nobility of mind to which no philosopher ever could attain, and an elevation of sentiment which nothing but divine grace could ever inspire.]

3. How they honour God—

[Here the darkest dispensations are acknowledged, as the fruits of a wisdom that cannot err, of a love that knows no bounds, of a fidelity that can never change. Methinks, if there were no other end for which afflictions were sent, this were sufficient to reconcile us unto all; for if they lead to such discoveries of God, and such an ascription of praise to him, they more than compensate for all the pain that they occasion during the pressure of them on our minds.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who know but little of affliction—

[A slight and superficial religion may satisfy you at present; but you will find it of little service when you come into trouble: nothing but deep piety will support you then. If you would be prepared for trials, you must get a sense of your own exceeding sinfulness, and of the wonderful mercies vouchsafed to you through the sufferings of the Son of God. Then the heaviest trials will appear light, yea, as nothing in comparison of your deserts, and nothing in comparison of the obligations conferred upon you.]

2. To those who have been brought into deep waters—

[Look not on your afflictions as tokens of God's wrath, but rather as expressions of his love. There is a need for them, else they never would have been sent; and if they operate to purify your souls from dross, you will have reason to be thankful for them to all eternity. Be not, then, so

[h] Mic. vii. 8, 9.

anxious for the removal of your trials, as for the sanctification of them to your souls. Make but the improvement of them which is suggested in my text, and you will have reason to adore God for them as the richest blessings that could be conferred upon you.]

OUTLINE NO. 1092

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO SUPPLIANTS.

Lam. iii. 25. *The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*

"THE earth," we are told, "is full of the goodness of the Lord[a]:" and indeed it is not possible to behold the universe at large, or to inspect with accuracy any thing that is contained in it, without being convinced that God is good to all, and that his tender mercy is over all his works[b]." But to the humble suppliant he manifests his goodness in a more especial manner, as we are informed in the words before us: from which we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The character here given of the Deity—

The humble suppliant is an object of his peculiar regard. To him he will pay attention,

1. In a way of merciful acceptance—

[He may have sinned grievously, and for a long season; yea, he may have equalled even Manasseh himself in his iniquities, and yet find mercy with the Lord, provided he seek for it in humble, earnest, and believing prayer[c] — — — He may have even backslidden from God, and fallen grievously, after having long professed himself a servant of God; and yet, on his repentance, God will heal his backslidings, and love him freely[d] — — — There are no bounds to the mercy of God towards returning penitents[e] — — —]

2. In a way of friendly communication—

[Let any soul "draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh unto him[f]:" and let him "open his mouth ever so wide,

[a] Ps. xxxiii. 5. [b] Ps. cxlv. 9. [c] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.
[d] Jer. iii. 22. Ps. xxxii. 5. [e] Isai. i. 18.
[f] Jam. iv. 8.

God will fill it[g]." Does he need direction in difficulties? God will cause him to "hear a voice behind him, saying, This is the way; walk thou in it[h]." Is he in deep affliction? God will afford him such a measure of support and consolation as his necessities shall require[i]. Does he need peculiar supplies of grace and strength? God will give him "grace sufficient for him[k]," and "strength according to his day[l]."]

3. In a way of gracious recompence—

[Not a sigh or groan shall pass unheeded by Almighty God[m], nor a tear fall without being treasured up in his vials[n]. And at the last day he will bear testimony to all the efforts which the contrite soul has made[o], and will compensate it with an eternal weight of glory; not indeed as a reward of debt, but as a reward of grace, which he has promised to all who seek him in his Son's name[p].]

And now what language will be sufficient to express,

II. The encouragement afforded by it—

To enter fully into this would occupy us too long. I will confine myself therefore to the hints suggested in my text. Surely this view of the Deity may encourage all of us,

1. To seek him with earnestness—

[Were God regardless of the prayers of the poor destitute, we might well sit down in despair. But "he invites to him the weary and heavy-laden;" and says, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me[q]." We may well therefore go to him, and "pour out our hearts before him," and plead with him, yea, and "wrestle with him," as Jacob did, determining "not to let him go until he bless us." This, so far from offending him, will rather be most acceptable to his Divine Majesty; because he bids us "seek him with our whole hearts" and with our whole souls[r] — — —]

2. To wait for him with patience—

[God may have many wise and gracious reasons for deferring his answers to our prayers: he may wish to embitter sin to us; to humble our souls more deeply; to make us more sensible of our need of mercy, and of our entire dependence

[g] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [h] Isai. xxx. 21. [i] Isai. li. 3.
[k] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [l] Deut. xxxiii. 25. [m] Ps. xii. 5.
[n] Ps. lvi. 8. [o] Isai. lxvi. 2.
[p] John vi. 37. Rom. iv. 5. [q] Ps. l. 15.
[r] 1 Chron. xxii. 19. Ps. cxix. 2.

on his grace. He may choose this way of weaning us from the world, of quickening us in all our duties, of advancing our attainments in the divine life, and of fitting us for greater usefulness to our fellow-sinners. He may delay his answers, so long as to make us doubt whether he has not "forgotten to be gracious unto us, and shut up his loving-kindness from us in displeasure." But, knowing his character, we should never abandon ourselves to despair, but "tarry his leisure;" and determine, if we perish, to perish at the foot of the cross, crying for mercy in Jesu's name. However long "the vision may tarry, we should wait for it," in a full and perfect confidence that "it shall not tarry" one single moment beyond what God in his wisdom sees to be the fittest time[s]. Of this we may assure ourselves, that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let none of us, then, neglect the duty of prayer—

[Prayer is indispensably required, in order to our obtaining of the Divine favour[t] — — — And "if we have not, it is either because we ask not, or because we ask amiss[u]." Brethren, remember, I pray you, what you have at stake; and trifle not in your approaches to the Most High God, as if he could be deceived by formal and heartless petitions. Could it once be said of you, "Behold, he prayeth!" we should have a good hope respecting you: but if you live not nigh to God, in the exercise of fervent prayer, we must declare to you, that God's goodness, so far as it respects you, will speedily come to an end, and be turned into wrathful indignation: for he has said, that "he will pour out his fury upon all who restrain prayer before him, and call not on his name[x]."]

2. Let us, in particular, exercise faith in prayer—

[A man "who asks with a wavering mind, can receive nothing of the Lord[y]." Believe that "he *is* good," according as he has said, to all who "call upon him in spirit and in truth." You are authorized to expect at his hands whatever you ask, provided the conferring of it will tend to your welfare, and to the honour of his name[z]. His promise to you is, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask, believing, ye shall receive[a]." "Be strong, then, in faith, giving glory to him;" and "never be straitened in yourselves, since you need never fear that ye shall be straitened in him:" for, as he is able, so is he also willing, to give you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or even think."]

[s] Hab. ii. 3. [t] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [u] Jam. iv. 2, 3.
[x] Jer. x. 25. [y] Jam. i. 6, 7. [z] 1 John v. 14, 15.
[a] Matt. xxi. 22.

OUTLINE NO. 1093

THE BENEFIT OF EARLY AFFLICTIONS.

Lam. iii. 27—29. *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope.*

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many passages which appear strange and paradoxical, but which do indeed contain the most important truths. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting," says Solomon: and again, "Sorrow is better than laughter[a]." These, taken in conjunction with our text, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," are as much opposed to the general sense of mankind, as any assertions can be: yet, the more they are considered, the more just and important will they be found. The truth is, that men judge of things only by their reference to time; but God's estimate is formed with a more immediate reference to eternity. If we consider only the operation of natural causes, we may see that the declaration in our text is just: for it is a common proverb, that 'practice makes easy;' and the earlier we are initiated into any art or science, the greater progress in it may be expected: but trials are indispensably necessary for the exercise of many of the Christian virtues: faith is called forth by difficulties; meekness and patience by provocations; forgiveness by injuries: so that a growth in these graces may be considered as materially advanced by early and long-continued occasions for their exercise. But, such is the corruption of our nature, that we need trials to purge it away: it is by fire that even good men must be refined from their dross: and, if we are called to experience afflictions in early life, we may hope our improvement will be proportionably great. In confirmation of this sentiment, we propose to shew *the benefit of early afflictions,*

[a] Eccl. vii. 2, 3.

I. In a general point of view—

David, who had had a long and early experience of troubles, confessed "it was good for him that he had been afflicted[b]." And beyond a doubt, much benefit may be reaped,

1. From temporal afflictions—

[The loss of health, of friends, of property, are heavy afflictions — — — yet, if duly improved, they may become real blessings to the soul. Illness in early life, though in many respects to be lamented and deprecated, tends exceedingly to counteract the vanity of the youthful mind, and the ardour of youthful passions. It renders a person sober, thoughtful, temperate, and willing to listen to subjects of a more serious cast; and keeps him from innumerable snares and difficulties, to which a buoyant spirit and a vigorous constitution would have exposed him.

Bereavements also (whether of friends or property), and disappointments in life, give us an early taste of the emptiness of the world, and the vanity of all created enjoyments. They have a tendency to direct the mind to higher pursuits, and to make us seek satisfaction, where alone it can be found, in the knowledge, the service, and the enjoyment, of God. The more we are made to feel that the creature is only a broken cistern, the more shall we be disposed to seek our consolation in the fountain of living waters.]

2. From spiritual afflictions—

[These are far heavier than any which mere temporal things can ever produce. "A man may sustain any trial respecting earthly things; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Yet are the groans and mournings of a deserted soul far preferable to the mirth and gaiety of a thoughtless sinner. A fear of God's wrath, though so distressing to the soul, has indeed a kindly influence upon us. How does it embitter to us the remembrance of former sins! How does it dispose us to desire true repentance, and to long for an interest in the Saviour! What a different aspect does the sacred volume bear under such a state of mind! and how tremendous its threatenings; how glorious its promises! how happy they to whom those promises are made! In a word, an apprehension of God's wrath assimilates the mind thus far to the mind of God himself; since it invariably inspires this thought, "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!"]

3. From afflictions for righteousness' sake—

[b] Ps. cxix. 71.

[These are often very deeply felt. A person who has embraced the Gospel feels in himself a change that should rather recommend him to the favour of the world: his tempers, his dispositions, his habits, his conduct, are all greatly improved; and yet he finds, that he is become an object of dislike, perhaps too of indignation and abhorrence. This is painful to the young disciple: when he begins to love his fellow-creatures, then he himself begins to be hated by them. His former habits, if ever so licentious, exposed him to a little blame perhaps, but not to hatred: but his love to the Gospel exposes him to all manner of hatred and contempt. This, I say, is painful; but yet it is very beneficial to his soul. He would be ready, like Lot, to linger in Sodom; but these persecutions tend to drive him out. They serve in a very peculiar manner to confirm in his mind the principles of the Gospel; because he is taught in that very Gospel to expect the treatment which he has received, and to bear his cross after Christ. He finds too in the Gospel, that to suffer for righteousness' sake is a matter for self-congratulation; that he is to "rejoice in it, and leap for joy;" to account it the highest honour; and to expect from it the richest reward. Thus a new set of feelings are brought into his soul; a set of feelings as far superior to any that he ever before experienced, as the most refined sensations of the soul are above the lowest appetites of a beast.]

But we will proceed to notice this subject,

II. In that particular view which is specified in the text—

There are two things in particular to which our attention is called, and which are of the greatest possible advantage to the soul;

1. Seclusion from the world—

[When there is nothing to oppress the mind, we are apt to be off our guard, and to degenerate into a dead and worldly frame. We too easily mix with worldly company, and are thereby led to adopt their sentiments, and to drink into their spirit. But when trouble comes upon us, we lose our relish for society: we affect retirement rather, that we may muse over the subjects of our grief; or, as our text expresses it, "We sit alone, and keep silence[c]." O, who can estimate the benefits arising from this source? By communing with our own hearts in their secret chamber, we attain a knowledge, which is not to be gained either from men or books,—the knowledge of our own hearts. In these seasons too we gain

[c] Jer. xv. 17.

such views of God, of his goodness, his mercy, his power, his grace, as are acquired only in the school of affliction. It is on these occasions also that the Lord Jesus Christ particularly endears himself to our souls, and communicates to us the abundance of his grace. In persons thus instructed there is for the most part a maturity of wisdom and of spiritual understanding that is rarely found amongst those who have never experienced the discipline of adversity. In comparison of others, they manifest the beauty and sweetness of religion in a high degree; excelling others as much as the experienced mariner does the man who has never combated a storm.]

2. Submission to God—

[" Tribulation worketh patience, experience, and hope." By directing the thoughts inwards, it leads us to see, what abundant occasion there is within us for Divine chastisements, and how much more lenient they are than we deserve; and they dispose us to say, " I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him[d]." At first, perhaps, nature revolts, and is impatient; but after a season, when we have " listened to the rod, and to Him that has appointed it," we become desirous only that it may drive out the folly that is bound up in our hearts. Then " we put our mouths in the dust," as penitents that are " dumb before God;" and we wait God's time, " if so be there may be hope," and his purpose may be ultimately accomplished, and the trials be sanctified to our eternal good. What a blessed state is this! like Aaron, " to hold our peace;" like Eli, to say, " Let him do what seemeth him good;" like Job, to bless the Lord; and, like David, to say, " Thou in very faithfulness hast afflicted me!" Surely to learn such lessons as these in early life is most desirable: and, if they cannot be learned without affliction, there is no affliction so severe, but that it will be richly recompensed by such an attainment.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have experienced no particular affliction—

[Whilst, on account of God's forbearance towards you, you have reason to be thankful, you have great reason also to fear: for, " if we are without chastisement, we are bastards, and not sons." At all events, there is much danger lest you become sad witnesses of that truth, " The prosperity of fools destroys them." Be watchful against the vanity of your deceitful hearts, and beg of God to augment towards you the communications of his grace in proportion to your peculiar necessities.]

[d] Mic. vii. 9.

2. Those who are called to bear the yoke—

[Remember that your trials are the fruit of God's love to your souls: for "whom he *loveth*, he chasteneth:" and, instead of thinking your lot hard, learn to "glory in your tribulations," and to "take pleasure in your distresses[e]." It was not an ignorant or enthusiastic man that said, "We count *them* happy that endure;" and who from that conviction exhorts us, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations[f]." Only take eternity into the account, and all your trials will appear light and momentary in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which they are working out for you[g].]

[e] Rom. v. 3. 2 Cor. xii. 10.
[f] Ps. xciv. 12. with Jam. i. 2, 12. and v. 11.
[g] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1094

COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED.

Lam. iii. 31—33. *The Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*

THE Prophet Jeremiah was, perhaps, above all other prophets, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It is possible, indeed, that in this chapter he may speak in part as a representative of the Hebrew nation; but still there is so much which has an immediate reference to himself, that we cannot but consider it as a record of his own experience[a]. At all events, the consolations which he administers, whether they refer to himself in his individual capacity, or to the people collectively, are suited to every person under heaven, whilst under the pressure of any trouble. To enlarge upon all the various topics which he adduces, would lead me too far, and would be the work of a large volume rather than of a single discourse. I shall content myself with noticing the subject so far only as it presents itself to us in the words which I have read: wherein you see,

[a] ver. 1—20.

Beyond a doubt, it is "God who causes grief"—

[It is remarkable that the prophet does not merely affirm this (though *that* would be an ample security for the truth of the position); but *he takes it for granted; "Though he cause* grief (which it must be acknowledged he does), *yet will he* have compassion." To this truth the whole Scripture bears record. God expressly asserts it: "I form the light, and *create darkness:* I make peace, and *create evil: I the Lord do all these things*[b]." Yea, so plain and undeniable is this truth, that the Prophet Amos *appeals* to us respecting it: "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it[c]?" Whatever we may imagine, "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring from the ground[d]:" but, whoever be the instrument that brings it upon us, God is in reality the Author of it; all creatures being only "as the axe or saw in the hands of Him that uses it," for the effecting of his own purposes[e].]

It is no less our duty than our privilege to acknowledge this—

[It is *our duty:* for we are not to conceive of any thing as left to *chance.* This would be no better than Atheism. In fact, no man can for a moment indulge such a conceit, but through a total ignorance of God; leading him to imagine, that to attend to such numerous and minute concerns would be a trouble to God: whereas, He is as able to order every thing in heaven and earth, as he was to create the universe at first. And surely to have such a view of him, is *an inestimable privilege;* because, if nothing be done but by a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, nothing can be done which shall not issue in his glory and his people's good. Whoever, then, be the immediate agent, it is our wisdom to trace every thing to the first great Cause of all; even as Job did, when, under all his complicated afflictions, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord[f]!"]

On this truth depends,

II. The consolation that is provided for us under it—

This is stated, as it were,

1. In answer to our fears—

[When our trials are heavy and accumulated, we are ready to fear that they *are sent in anger* and *will issue in our*

[b] Isai. xlv. 7. [c] Amos iii. 6. [d] Job v. 6.
[e] Isai. x. 15. [f] Job i. 21.

destruction. But God assures us, that "he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men" without necessity. There is, if I may so speak, a "needs be" for them[g]; some evil to be corrected, or some good to be administered. Earthly parents are sometimes led by caprice, and "correct their children *for their pleasure:*" but God never does it but "*for our profit,* that we may be partakers of his holiness[h]."

As for our trials *issuing in our destruction,* the very reverse is God's intent in sending them: he sends them "to humble us, and to prove us, and *to do us good at our latter end*[i]." Did he intend "to cast us off for ever," he would rather say, "They are joined to idols: let them alone[k]." But it is not so that God deals with his people. "He will not cast off his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[l]." "He will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: for once has he sworn, by his holiness, that he will not lie unto David," the great Head and Representative of all his people[m].]

2. In accordance with our hopes—

[What does the afflicted soul desire but this, that "though God cause grief, yet will he have compassion?" This is what God does in the midst of the very chastisements he inflicts. "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel," even when for their iniquities he had delivered them into the hand of their enemies[n]. Nor will he measure out his compassion according to *our merits,* but "according to the multitude of *his own mercies.*" Nothing less than this, indeed, will satisfy the afflicted soul: nor, indeed, will any thing less satisfy our compassionate God, who "in all our afflictions is himself afflicted; and who, in his love and in his pity, will effect our complete redemption[o]." The entire view of his dealings with us may be seen in his conduct towards his people of old: "Many times did he deliver them: but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented *according to the multitude of his mercies*[p]." "In a little wrath, he may hide his face from us for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us[q]."]

APPLICATION—

Let us endeavour,

1. To get just views of the Divine character—

[g] 1 Pet. i. 6. [h] Heb. xii. 10. [i] Deut. viii. 16.
[k] Hos. iv. 17. [l] 1 Sam. xii. 22. [m] Ps. lxxxix. 32—35.
[n] Judges x. 16. [o] Isai. lxiii. 9. [p] Ps. cvi. 43—45.
[q] Isai. liv. 7—10.

[There can be no comfort to the soul whilst we view God as a vindictive Judge. As long as we are really desiring his favour, we are authorized to regard him as a loving Father, who seeks only the welfare of our souls. If we see a husbandman prune his vine, or a workman chisel his stone, or a goldsmith put his gold into the fire, we are at no loss to account for their conduct, even though, to the eye of sense, it may appear severe: to improve the vine, to beautify the stone, to purify the gold, to bring forth from the furnace a vessel meet for the Master's use, are, in our minds, an ample vindication of the apparent severity. Let us, then, conceive of God as wise, and good, and gracious, and as personally interested in our welfare; and then we shall never murmur at any of his dispensations; but shall say, under the most painful trials, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."]

2. To make a suitable improvement of afflictive dispensations—

[Every "rod has a voice, which we ought to hear, as well as Him also that has appointed it[r]." Would we but listen attentively to God speaking to us in the night-season of affliction[s], verily, we should learn many invaluable lessons. We often acquire a more just and comprehensive and endearing knowledge of God in one hour of adversity, than we had previously gained in whole years of prosperity[t]. Those who are accustomed to behold fine paintings, know that there is a point of view, in which if we are placed, we shall see every figure, as it were, standing out of the canvass. Now God is sometimes pleased to call us to this point, that we may have richer views of his Divine character. The ascent to the place may be difficult, and attended with pain; but the subsequent views will richly repay all our labour. Let us then especially seek to improve in our knowledge of God, and in an admiration of his adorable perfections. And if there be in us any evil, which God has discovered to our view, let us put it away, though it be dear to us as a right eye, or apparently necessary to us as a right hand. If our afflictions do but "yield us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, we shall never have reason to complain, however much we may have been exercised by them[u]." Only let them "purge away our dross and our tin[x]," and we shall bless God for the furnace by which this blessed change has been effected. "The trials that have been productive of so great a blessing will issue in praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ[y]," and through the countless ages of eternity[z].]

[r] Mic. vi. 9. [s] Ps. xvi. 7. [t] Job xxxvi. 8—10.
[u] Heb. xii. 11. [x] Isai. i. 25. [y] 1 Pet. i. 6. 7.
[z] Rev. vii. 13—17.

OUTLINE NO. 1095

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Lam. iii. 54—57. *Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.*

THE Prophet Jeremiah was inferior to none in a compassionate regard for his country, whose calamities he bitterly deplored: yet was there no one more injuriously treated than he. He might well say of himself, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath[a]." Of his grief, on account of his country's sufferings, and of the sad returns which his enemies made to him, he speaks in the preceding context, and in terms peculiarly tender and pathetic: "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down from heaven. Mine eye afflicteth mine heart, because of all the daughters of my city. [Yet] mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me." The working of his mind, in this afflictive situation, he delineates in the words of our text: from which we may notice,

I. To what a state God's most favoured servants may be reduced—

[Jeremiah, for his fidelity in declaring God's purposes respecting that rebellious people, was cast into a dungeon, where he sunk in the mire, and was left to perish[b]. And in this situation he altogether despaired of life, and said, "I am cut off," "I am cut off out of the land of the living!" Distressing as this situation was, it may yet be expected to be endured by the faithful ministers of God in every age. Peter, in his day, was laden with chains in an inner prison, without the slightest hope of surviving the day appointed for his execution[c]. Paul and Silas also, with their backs lacerated

[a] ver. 1. [b] Jer. xxxviii. 4—6. [c] Acts xii. 6.

with scourges, and their feet made fast in the stocks, "had the sentence of death in themselves," and expected nothing but a speedy and a cruel death[d]. And we, too, are warned by our blessed Lord, that we must be ready to lay down our lives for him; and that on no other condition can we hope for a favourable acceptance with him in the last day.

But there are other troubles yet more afflictive than these, to which every child of God is exposed, and under which he may be brought into the depths of despondency. There are seasons of temptation and spiritual desertion, in which the soul is led to say, with Heman, "My soul is full of troubles; my life draweth nigh unto the grave. Thou hast laid me *in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.* Thy wrath lieth hard upon me; thou hast afflicted me with *all thy waves.* Lord, Why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die. While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have *cut me off*[e]." Here was a man of consummate piety, and yet thus bereft of consolation, and almost of hope. And such afflictive visitations are experienced by many at the present day. When the spirits have been broken by a long train of misfortunes, and disease of body has still further enfeebled the mind, it is not uncommon for Satan to make a fierce assault upon the soul, and, by his fiery darts, to inflict on it a deadly wound, such as causes it to despair even of life. The Saviour himself, in the depths of dereliction, cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if his followers also be called to taste of that cup which he drank even to the dregs.]

In the Prophet's experience, however, we see,

II. What remedy is open to them—

["I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon: hide not thine ear at my breathing and my cry." Affliction drove him not from God, but to him: and though his overwhelming calamities disqualified him for that kind of orderly address which, in a season of calm reflection, he might have presented at the throne of grace, yet, by sighs and cries, he made known his desires to the Lord, who understands the language of the heart, though not expressed in clear and appropriate terms by the lips. To the same effect David says, "I opened my mouth and panted; for I longed for thy commandments[f]:" by which I understand, that his desire to fulfil the commands of God was too great for utterance; so that he

[d] Acts xvi. 23, 24. [e] Ps. lxxxviii. 3, 6, 7, 14—16.
[f] Ps. cxix. 131.

was constrained to express it only by deep sighs and ardent aspirations. Thus it was with the prophet at this time, when looking to his God with humble *breathings* and with fervent cries. Like Jonah at the bottom of the sea, he cried, "I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple[g]."

Now, this is our proper remedy at all seasons: "Call upon me in the time of trouble, saith the Lord; and I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Nor need we be discouraged because we are not able so to compose our minds as to pour out our hearts in fluent and connected petitions. Abrupt cries are fitly suited to occasions of great extremity. Our blessed Lord himself, when in an agony in the garden of Gethsemane, cried thrice to his heavenly Father, *repeating the same words*[h]. It is not the fluency of our expressions that God regards, but the sincerity of our hearts: and, for the most part, when "his blessed Spirit makes intercession in us" with more than ordinary power, it is not by diversified and rhetorical language, but "by groans which cannot be uttered[i]." Whatever therefore our trouble be, and however desperate our condition, let us "give ourselves unto prayer[k];" and not doubt but that God, who "heareth the ravens," will "hear the voice of our weeping[l]," and "fulfil the desire of our hearts[m]." If we do but "look unto him, we shall be lightened[n]."]

The answer he received will lead us to contemplate,

III. The efficacy of that remedy, whensoever applied—

[In his despondency, the prophet had said, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through[o]." But he found to his joy, that nothing could intercept either his communion with God, or his communications from God: for "God drew nigh to him, and said, Fear not." What marvellous condescension was here! Whilst man was treating him as "the offscouring and refuse of the people[p]," God regarded him with all the tenderness of a Father, and bade him to fear nothing that man could do against him. And will God be less gracious to *us*, in our extremities? No: "he will surely hear the cry of the poor destitute, and will not despise their prayer[q]." Hear the experience of David, and in him of the Messiah also: "Save me, O God! for the waters

[g] Jonah ii. 4. [h] Matt. xxvi. 44. [i] Rom. viii. 26.
[k] Ps. cix. 4. [l] Ps. vi. 8. [m] Ps. cxlv. 19.
[n] Ps. xxxiv. 5. [o] ver. 44. [p] ver. 45.
[q] Ps. cii. 17.

are come in unto my soul. I *sink in deep mire*, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dry: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. I am poor and sorrowful: let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high." Having thus pleaded with God, and obtained an answer of peace, he adds, for the encouragement of all future suppliants, "The humble shall see this, and be glad; and your heart shall live that seek God: for *the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners*[r]." "Hear ye this," then, all ye who, from whatever circumstances, are brought into deep waters! "Call upon the Lord out of the depths[s];" and you shall soon be able to adopt the grateful recollections of David, and say, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears."

But let me more particularly call your attention to the consolatory voice of God in my text: "Fear not." Were you really in the hands of your enemies, you might well fear: but *they*, as well as you, are in the hands of God, who can "make even the wrath of man to praise him." Here is "a weapon formed against you," and "a waster" ready to wield it for your destruction: but they can effect nothing without God; since the very smith who formed the weapon, and the waster that threatens your destruction, are the work of his hands, and owe to him all the skill and power of which they are possessed. What then can they do against *Him;* or against those who are under *his* protection[t]? Know, that to every soul that trusteth in him is this word addressed; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."]

[r] Ps. lxix. 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 29, 32, 33. [s] Ps. cxxx. 1.
[t] Isai. liv. 15—17.

EZEKIEL.

OUTLINE NO. 1096

COMMISSION GIVEN TO MINISTERS.

Ezek. ii. 4. *Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God.*

ASTONISHING is the patience which God has exercised in all ages towards his rebellious creatures. After their wickedness had attained such an height that he was constrained to pour out his indignation upon them at the Deluge, he still deferred his judgments an hundred and twenty years, that, if possible, he might reclaim the world by the ministrations of Noah. At a later period, when he had chosen to himself a peculiar people, and with mighty signs and wonders had brought them forth out of Egypt, and they requited all his kindness with nothing but murmurings and disobedience; though their provocations were beyond all conception great, he bore with them for the space of forty years, and would not utterly take away his loving-kindness from them. Again, when he had sent his people into captivity for the multitude of their iniquities, and especially for despising all his reproofs, and persecuting all his prophets[a], he still would not altogether abandon them, but sent his servant Ezekiel to preach to them in the land whither they were carried captive. In the words of our text we are informed what Ezekiel was commissioned to say unto them: it was emphatically *this;* "THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD." We do

[a] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

not suppose that this was the whole of Ezekiel's message; but it was a peculiarly important and emphatical part of it: it was that which above all other things characterized the end and object of his mission. It is particularly to be noticed, that no *specific message is annexed to these words;* and that they occur twice also in the following chapter precisely in the same way[b]. Can we suppose that so peculiar a commission should contain in it no more than what appears upon the surface? Surely it must be acknowledged to be either very defective, or very comprehensive. To say that it was defective, would be to arraign the wisdom of God himself: we shall do well therefore to search into its real and extensive import. Three things then were evidently implied in it (which indeed are implied also in the commission given to ministers at this day); namely,

I. To declare God's will—

[God has declared it unto *us* — — — And *we* are to declare it unto others with fidelity and affection — — — When objections are made to the word delivered, we must produce our warrant from the Holy Scriptures, and remind them whose word it is; "Thus saith THE LORD GOD." With this we ourselves are to be satisfied; and we must require others to regulate their views by the infallible dictates of inspiration — — —]

II. To assert His authority—

[We find men in a state of rebellion against God — — — We, as his ambassadors, are to offer them terms of reconciliation — — — If our terms be thought too humiliating, we must declare that God will never offer them any other; and that unless they accept these, they must inevitably perish — — —While we encourage them by representations of God's mercy and love, we must also intimidate them with exhibitions of his justice, his power, and his truth — — —]

III. To seek, notwithstanding all our discouragements, the salvation of their souls—

[We must expect, that, if we discharge our duty aright, we shall meet with many and great discouragements: "briers and thorns will be with us; yea, we shall *dwell* among *scorpions.*" But "nothing is to move us," "nor should we account

[b] Ezek. iii. 11, 27.

even our lives dear unto us, so that we may but fulfil our ministry," and be "pure from the blood of all men" — — — The saving of souls is the work committed to us; and we must prosecute that work, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear" — — —]

LEARN from hence,

1. The importance of the ministry—

[God has ceased to impart his mind to men in a way of immediate revelation. His written word is that by which he now instructs the world: and he has set apart an order of men, whose duty it is to make known his revealed will. They are "not to teach for doctrines the commandments of men," but simply to declare what God himself has spoken. In the execution of their office they are God's ambassadors, yea, if we may so speak, his representatives: they speak to men "in Christ's stead;" and the word they deliver, is "not theirs, but God's." Whilst then, on the one hand, we magnify our office, we ought, on the other hand, to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?"]

2. The duty of those who are ministered unto—

[When a minister is proclaiming, "Thus saith the Lord God," the people should "tremble at the word;" and, whilst he "declares the whole counsel of God," it becomes them to "receive it with meekness" and simplicity. They should not be offended at his fidelity, but be thankful for it. They would not commend a watchman, who should leave a family to be burnt in their beds, rather than alarm them with the cry of fire; or a sentinel, who should suffer a camp to be surprised by their enemy, because he would not alarm them by giving notice of their approach: much less then should they approve of those who "prophesy smooth things," and "speak peace unto them, when there is no peace." "Those who have God's word, must speak God's word faithfully;" and those who hear it, should obey it cheerfully, and without reserve.]

OUTLINE NO. 1097

APPROACHING END OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE.

Ezek. vii. 5—9. *Thus saith the Lord God: An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come; the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come; the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee,*

and accomplish mine anger upon thee; and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways, and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth.

EZEKIEL is perhaps the most terrific writer of all the prophets: there is a force and energy in his denunciations which can find no parallel: his repetitions are so frequent, as to present before the view of the reader the very judgments which he predicts. In the chapter before us we are made to see, as it were, the Chaldean army in the very act of desolating the city and temple of Jerusalem, and of carrying into captivity all who should survive the mortality occasioned by pestilence, by famine, by the sword[a]. In fact, the siege commenced within three years of these predictions, and terminated in their most exact accomplishment. It is not our intention to enter into the consideration of this prophecy as it relates to the Jews: we shall rather take occasion from it to observe in general,

I. That the final execution of God's judgments is fast approaching—

The period for the execution of them is certainly fixed in the Divine counsels—

["Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world." Nothing is left to chance: every thing takes place "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." We are ready to consider things as depending altogether on those by whose agency, or whose authority, they are done. But men are only instruments in God's hands: they are his sword, and the staff of his indignation; and they only carry into effect what "his hand and his counsel have determined before to be done." The elements in like manner all "fulfil his will." It was at the precise time that he had ordained, that the waters deluged the earth, and that fire and brimstone consumed the cities of the plain. As in the self-same night that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, God brought his people out of Egypt; so at the precise period fixed by him were they carried captive to

[a] See the foregoing chapter.

Babylon, and dispersed all over the world at the destruction of their ecclesiastical and civil polity by the Romans. The time also for the day of judgment is fixed, though it is still hid in the bosom of the Father: and "the times," whether of communities or individuals, are altogether "in his hands."]

When that period is arrived, they will be executed to the uttermost—

[At present there is mercy mixed with judgment; but in the last day there will be "judgment without mercy." Wrath now comes on offenders with measured severity; but then without any other measure than their own deserts. Then the cup of God's indignation will be poured out for them without mixture, and they shall drink it to the very dregs[b]. Terrible is that name whereby the day of judgment is designated, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men[c]." This present time may, even in reference to the ungodly, be called "The day of salvation;" because salvation is freely offered to every one of them: but *that* is "the day of wrath," against which an accumulated and daily augmenting treasure of wrath is laid up for them, and shall "come upon them to the uttermost."]

This view of the day of judgment sufficiently shews,

II. That that time should be much and deeply contemplated—

Let us then contemplate,

1. Its gradual approach—

[Every day and every hour is bringing it nearer to us. The delay to us indeed may appear long: but it is nothing when compared with eternity: "A thousand years are in God's sight as one day, and one day as a thousand years." Profane persons and infidels will ask, as it were, in derision, "Where is the promise of his coming[d]?" But "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[e]." Let *those who are advanced in life* consider this. *Their* days must of necessity be few; and consequently every hour should appear to them as it does to criminals under sentence of death; even the striking of the clock should remind them, that the hour for their departure is rapidly advancing, and must soon arrive. And *young persons too* should remember, that they also are liable to be cut off in the midst of their days; and that, even if they live to the age of man, their time will soon have

[b] Rev. xiv. 10, 11. [c] 2 Pet. iii. 7
[d] 2 Pet. iii. 4. [e] 2 Pet. ii. 3.

passed away, and appear as a dream in the night. But our text informs us, that "the end watcheth for us:" yea, it may come as a thief in the night." Who then should not stand on his watch-tower, that he may be prepared for it?]

2. Its actual arrival—

[The day of judgment, whenever it shall arrive, will find men as much unprepared for it as at this moment. In the days of Noah, persons of every description engaged in their respective occupations with the same confidence as if nothing had been spoken respecting a deluge; "they ate, they drank, they planted, they builded, they married and were given in marriage, till the very day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came: thus will it be also in the day of judgment; persons of every age and condition will be as secure as at any period of their existence, till the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge shall summon them to his tribunal. What a sound will this then be, "An end, the end, is come!" Then will be an *end* of all that now renders life desirable; an end of all pleasures, whatever be their kind or quality; an end of all means of grace, no opportunity now remaining for prayer and seeking after God: there will be an end of all hope of mercy, the door of heaven being closed, as Noah's ark was, by the hand of God himself. Then will be "an evil, an only evil," such as will have no mixture of good in it. O what "a morning" will that be, when the voice shall sound, "Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment!" This will not be a mere echo, a delusion, "a sound reverberated from the mountains;" but a fearful reality. Let us for a moment contemplate the state of the antediluvian world, when they saw the face of the earth gradually disappearing, and the loftiest mountains sinking into the waters of the great deep: O what fear, what terror, what distraction would be visible on every side! Thus will millions, in the last day, be "calling upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." Would to God that men would now endeavour to realize that scene; and that they would "prepare," whilst yet there is time afforded them, "to meet their God!"]

That time being the commencement of a never-ending eternity, it is obvious,

III. That we should spend our whole lives in preparation for it—

What is the preparation that becomes us?

1. We should humble ourselves before God for all our sins—

[When Nineveh was warned that in forty *days* it should be overthrown, the inhabitants, from the highest to the lowest, repented of their sins in sackcloth and ashes; yes, they, though heathens, and warned only respecting the death of the body, made this improvement of their time. How much more then should *we* do it, who are warned respecting the death of our souls, and know not that we have forty *hours* to live! If God will "judge us according to our ways," and "pour out his fury" upon all in proportion to their sins, methinks we should mourn over our sins day and night, and get them washed away in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," even in "the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin."]

2. We should get our souls renewed by Divine grace—

[The foolish virgins, as well as the wise, expected the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom: but the foolish were not careful to have oil in their vessels with their lamps: hence, when the cry was made, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" they had their oil to seek, and were therefore excluded from the marriage-feast[f]. This shews us what should be now our one concern. If we have not the Spirit of God dwelling in us, in vain will be all our profession, in vain the flame which arises only from our natural spirits: the distinction between us and others will speedily appear, and a corresponding judgment be passed upon us. How long he may delay his coming, or how soon he may arrive, we know not; and therefore we should not lose an hour in seeking that unction of the Holy One, which alone can fit us for the possession and enjoyment of the heavenly bliss.]

3. We should be watching against every thing that may unfit us for the Divine presence—

[This is the instruction which the Apostles uniformly give us: "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer[g]:" and again, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand[h]." There are dangers and temptations all around us: not only do evil things solicit our regard, but things that are most innocent often become a snare to us. Surely then it becomes "those who have wives to be as though they had none, and those who weep to be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not[i]." "The fashion of this world is passing rapidly away;" and "then cometh the end." O! happy they who are prepared for it! Happy they "whose

[f] Matt. xxv. 1—13.
[g] 1 Pet. iv. 7.
[h] Phil. iv. 5.
[i] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

loins are girt, and whose lamps are trimmed, and whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching for him!" "What I say then unto one, I say unto all, Watch."]

4. We should be intent on finishing the work which God has given us to do—

[Our Lord cautions us to "work while it is day, for the night is coming, wherein no man can work." When the end cometh, there is no more scope for exertion, no further opportunity to supply what is defective, or to remedy what is amiss: "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave." "Whatsoever then our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might"———]

OUTLINE NO. 1098

HIDDEN ABOMINATIONS EXPOSED.

Ezek. viii. 15. *Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.*

MAN is ready to complain of God's judgments, as though they were unmerited or severe. But "God will be justified in his sayings, and will overcome when he is judged[a]." The captives in Babylon thought that God had dealt hardly with them. God therefore gave to the Prophet Ezekiel, who was amongst the captives there, a vision of what was at that very time transacting in the temple at Jerusalem, notwithstanding the judgments that had been inflicted on them. This was the sixth year of king Jehoiakim's captivity; and yet did the remnant of the people in Jerusalem continue as impenitent as ever. It was on account of their idolatries that God had given them over into the hands of the Chaldeans: yet was idolatry practised at Jerusalem in all its most hateful and abominable forms, even by the priests and elders, who ought to have exerted their authority to repress it. They laboured, indeed, to conceal their impiety from common observation; and therefore they built a wall to obstruct the common entrance into the place where they assembled: but the prophet, in his vision,

[a] Rom. iii. 4.

spied a hole in the wall, which he was directed to enlarge, so as to get access to the door; and then on entering at the door, "he saw every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about, and seventy elders, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan at their head, offering clouds of incense to them[b]." Being directed then to go to another part of the temple, he saw "still greater abominations," even a multitude of "women sitting, weeping for Tammuz," some deified monster of iniquity[c]." Then, in the passage which I have read, he was told, that, on going to another part of the temple, he should "see greater abominations still." Accordingly, he went into the inner court of the temple, and there saw about five-and-twenty men, "with their backs towards that part of the temple" where the holy of holies was, and which was the more immediate residence of the Deity, and "worshipping the sun towards the east[d]." The Lord then appeals to the prophet, whether there was not abundant reason for the judgments which he had inflicted on the nation; and declares his determination to chastise them with yet greater severity; "Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? Therefore will I deal with them in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and, though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them[e]."

In its primary sense, this passage doubtless refers only to the Jews; and to them at the period here specified. But, when we consider that the deportation of the Jewish people into captivity, their subsequent deliverance from that captivity, and their restoration to their own land, were all typical of what yet passes in the world, and in the Church, and in the heart, we feel authorized so far to accommodate the words of our text to existing circumstances, as to take occasion from them to point out the hidden

[b] ver. 7—11. [c] ver. 13, 14. [d] ver. 15, 16. [e] ver. 17, 18.

abominations which may be discovered from a closer inspection of,

I. The world—

The abominations that are visible to all are exceeding great—

[It is not possible to have the least intercourse with the world, and not see that iniquity abounds on every side. In truth, "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or under the power of the Wicked-one[f] — — —]

But the more we know of the world, the more wicked will it appear—

[A person who looks only on the outward appearance of things would be ready to think that St. Paul's description of mankind is a libel on human nature. But the picture which he draws is indeed but too accurate. "Men like not to retain God in their knowledge; and therefore he gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them[g]." There is no abomination that was ever practised amongst the most abandoned of mankind in former ages, but may still be found, nearly, if not altogether, to the same extent as ever. Where Christianity has diffused its light, these deeds of darkness are kept from common observation: but human nature is the same in every age; and "the god of this world" exercises over it the same despotic sway as ever[h].]

The same humiliating truth may be applied also to,

II. The Church—

The outward-court worshippers are, for the most part, exceedingly corrupt—

[Let any one dispassionately survey the principles and practices of the Church of Rome; and then say, whether the abominations of that Church will not be found abundant, in proportion as the scrutiny is minute. What is the very foun-

[f] 1 John v. 19. ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ.

[g] Rom. i. 27—32.

[h] Eph. ii. 2.

dation of the whole edifice of Popery, but a compound of pride, ambition, covetousness, fraud, cruelty? The doctrine of merit is at the root of all. The heads of that Church have no object in view but to promote their own secular interests and power. They draw from the votaries of their religion all which they can by any means exact. A system of lying wonders is maintained, to delude their followers: and the most horrible cruelties are exercised towards those who submit not to their impious ordinances and institutions. The Heathen themselves are not more flagrant in their idolatries, than they who exalt the Virgin Mother above their Incarnate God.

I say these things in reference to the Romish Church, because the ear of Protestants is open to receive the truth in relation to a Church from which they have separated. But, if Protestant Churches are freed from some of the grosser abominations of Popery, are they not on a par with Papists themselves in relation to the evils from which Popery has sprung? Do we not find Protestants, whether priests or people, as secularized as any of the votaries of Popery can be? Do we not find them as full of pride, ambition, covetousness, fraud, cruelty, as Papists themselves, only not exercising these dispositions exactly in the same way? The truth is, that, amongst the generality of Christians, there is little found except the name: and that, if they had been brought up as heathens, they would have occupied much the same place in the scale of morals, as they do at this hour.]

Would to God we could except from this censure the worshippers of the inner court!

[On the two first occasions, the prophet was directed to the outer court of the temple; but, on the last, God himself, in his vision, "brought him to the *inner* court of the Lord's house[i]." Come we, then, to inspect that part of the Church which professes more of sanctity, and boasts of greater nearness to God. Are there no abominations to be found there? Are there no evil practices indulged by those who would be thought to excel in piety? It is well, perhaps, that the world do not know all that passes in the secret inclosures of the temple: for they would be far more stumbled than they are by the inconsistencies and impieties which would there be found. They do wrong, indeed, in casting reflections on religion, on account of the faults of those who profess it. "To speak evil of the way of truth[k]," and to "blaspheme the name of God[l]," on account of the falls of professors, is absurd in the extreme: for religion discountenances evil of every kind; and, as far as it prevails in the soul, it restrains evil. And therefore

[i] ver. 16. [k] 2 Pet. ii. 2. [l] Rom. ii. 24.

whilst I open the abominations of the inner court, I solemnly guard all against imputing them to religion, or thinking less favourably of religion on account of them. But it must be confessed, that, amongst religious professors, there are multitudes who walk unworthy of their holy profession; multitudes, who are as worldly and as covetous in their desires, as destitute of truth and honesty in their dealings: yea, and as corrupt and vicious in their practices, as the ungodly world. Those who have seen the interior of religious societies, and witnessed the proud domineering spirit of some, the conceit and forwardness of others, the bigotry of others, the hypocrisies, envyings, evil-speakings of others, the lying and dishonesty of others, the lewdness and impurity of others; in a word, those who know the most of what is *called* the religious world, will have seen, to their grief and shame, that the evils of the seven Asiatic Churches are far from being yet excluded from the fold of Christ: there are yet "wolves in sheep's clothing," many who "say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;" and, though professedly of the Church of Christ, are yet, in truth, "of the synagogue of Satan[m]." God knoweth, that, in declaring these things, we would be glad to be found false witnesses, and to retract our assertions, if the truth of them were not unhappily established beyond all possibility of doubt.]

It is yet further applicable to,

III. The heart—

This, as the prophet tells us, is superlatively deceitful—

[There is not any thing which we greatly affect, but the heart will find out some special reason for doing it: nor are we called to any thing that will thwart our inclinations, and obstruct our interests, but it will furnish us with some convenient pretext for declining to make the sacrifice. It has a great deal of ingenuity, in covering the malignity of what is evil, and in discharging us from the obligation of what is good[n]. By the substitution of a name, it operates a change in our views of any action, as much as if it changed the quality of the action itself. Under its guidance, covetousness becomes a just regard for one's family; bigotry, a holy zeal; cowardice, a prudential care. Peter thought with himself, perhaps, to benefit the circumcision, when he constrained the Gentiles to submit to Jewish ordinances; whereas he was beguiled by a fear of that resentment which the Judaizing teachers were likely to manifest, if he did not comply with their wishes: and Barnabas too, and other holy Jews, were

[m] Rev. iii. 9.

[n] Isai. v. 20.

carried away by his dissimulation[o]. There is no man who is not at times betrayed by it into some line of conduct, which, on a more calm and disinterested view of it, is found to have been injudicious: and we often find that the motives for which we gave ourselves credit were only a delusion of Satan, operating under the semblance of an angel of light[p].]

It is also, as the same prophet informs us, unsearchably wicked[q]—

[The corruptions of it are, for depth, unfathomable; for number, countless; for enormity, surpassing all conception. None but the heart-searching God himself can know it. Let any one mark, for one single day, the workings of his heart, and the thoughts which pass through it; and he will be perfectly amazed, that a creature, sensible in some measure of his obligations to God, and desirous to serve him, should, in despite of all his endeavours to purify himself, be so corrupt. But, after having accomplished the most diligent search, and renewed it ever so often, he will be very far from having attained a perfect self-knowledge; and circumstances will still arise, that shall bring fresh corruptions to light, or place their workings in a new point of view: so that, on turning again to view some corner unexplored, he shall find more and greater abominations than before.]

BEHOLD then here—

1. The folly of man—

[The Jews in the temple, having concealed themselves by a wall from the eyes of men, and practising their abominations "in the dark chambers of their imagery," supposed that they were hidden from the eyes of God also. "They said, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth[r]." But God saw them, and directed the prophet how to get a sight of them also. And can we suppose that God does not see us, or that he will not record our ways in the book of his remembrance? Be it known to you, my brethren, that "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves[s]." "God knows the things that come into our mind, every one of them[t];" and "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart[u]." Settle it then in your minds, that God's eye is over you; and never presume to do that in darkness which you would be ashamed to have proclaimed upon the house-tops.]

[o] Gal. ii. 12, 13. [p] 2 Cor. xi. 14. [q] Jer. xvii. 9.
[r] ver. 12. [s] Job xxxiv. 22. [t] Ezek. xi. 5.
[u] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

2. The forbearance of God—

[What does God behold! All the iniquity that is committed upon the face of the whole earth is seen by him completely, in all its bearings, and with all its aggravations. How wonderful must be his patience, that he can bear thus with us, under such an accumulated load of guilt! We wonder not that he once destroyed the earth with a deluge, or once poured fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain: the wonder is, that these judgments have not been so repeated, as utterly to destroy the whole human race. To go no further than to our own individual state: that man can know little of himself, who is not utterly amazed that he is at this moment an inhabitant of earth, and not doomed, long since, to endure all the pains and miseries of hell. Let then "this patience and long-suffering and forbearance no longer be despised; but let the goodness of our God lead us to repentance[x]."]

3. The wonders of redeeming love—

[This is the world for which God has given his only-begotten Son. This is the world for which the Lord Jesus Christ left the bosom of his Father, and came down to earth, that he might bleed and die. Nor in this whole world is there a single individual, who, if he repent and believe in Jesus, shall not find acceptance with his God. Not one should be cast out; no, not one: "Though his sins were red as crimson, they should be white as snow." What wonders of love are here! Who can ever comprehend their height and depth, their length and breadth? Search into them ever so deeply, and contemplate them ever so minutely, and we will say without hesitation, "Turn again, and you shall see greater wonders than these." Indeed, to all eternity will they be unfolding to us, with ever-augmented light and evidence; and to all eternity will they be to us an ever-increasing source of joy and blessedness. To contemplate them here, is the way to be filled with all the fulness of grace[y]; and to contemplate them in heaven, will be to us a fulness of glory for evermore[z].]

[x] Rom. ii. 4. [y] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [z] Rev. v. 8—13.

OUTLINE NO. 1099

DUTY AND BENEFIT OF MOURNING FOR SIN.

Ezek. ix. 4. *And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*

THERE is in the minds of ungodly men an atheistical idea, that God "does not regard" the actions of men; and that, as to any interference in their concerns, "he has forsaken the earth." This was a common sentiment among the Jews[a]; and it *practically* obtains to a vast extent amongst us. To imagine that God notices such trifling matters as those which occupy our minds, is supposed to derogate from his honour. But God is omnipresent and omniscient; the minutest as well as the greatest things are all equally present to his all-seeing eye; and every thing is noticed by him with an especial view to a future day of retribution. This is particularly stated in the whole of the preceding chapter. The elders of Israel who were at Jerusalem were given to idolatry; but they were extremely anxious to conceal their practices from the eyes of men: hence they performed their idolatrous rites in some secret chambers of the temple, which they had enclosed with a wall in order to a more effectual concealment. But God in a vision pointed out to his prophet, who was at Babylon, every thing that was transacted in the temple at Jerusalem: and, after having given him many successive and more enlarged views of the abominations that were committed there, issued an order to the angels who had charge over the city, "to go forth and slay" the offenders; but strictly prohibited them from coming near to any person to whom these abominations had been a source of grief, and who had, in consequence of that, been "marked in the forehead" by a person expressly commissioned for that purpose[b].

Though the whole of this was a vision, it was, in fact, a just representation of the distinction which God would make between the persons who were guilty of idolatry, and those who lamented its prevalence among them: and it may serve to shew us, in a very instructive way,

I. The character of the Lord's people—

[a] Ezek. viii. 12. and ix. 9.

[b] Read the whole preceding chapter, as connected with the text.

Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates:" and, as it prevailed to an awful extent at that day, so abominations of every kind yet prevail—

[They prevail *in the world* at large. We speak not now of the evils that are visible to all, but of those which are of a more hidden nature. In every order of society there are peculiar and appropriate evils, justified perhaps by those who commit them, yea possibly dignified with the name of virtues, which yet are an utter "abomination in the sight of God." Were all the intrigues of the ambitious, the wantonness of the licentious, the deceits of the covetous, the characteristic arts of every class of sinners, exposed to view, what a mass of iniquity should we behold! Yet God beholds it all; a mass which infinitely exceeds our highest conceptions, and which none but God himself could endure to behold.

They prevail also, we regret to say it, even *in the Church* of God. It was amongst those who professed the worship of the true God, that all those abominations were practised in the Temple at Jerusalem: and we know that many lamentable evils were found in the Churches that were planted by the Apostles themselves. Can we wonder, then, if at this time tares be growing up with the wheat? It were vain to deny that there are many who dishonour their holy profession, and give sad occasion to the enemies of religion to blaspheme that name whereby we are named. The pride, intolerance, and overbearing conceit of Diotrephes may yet be found, amidst high professions of superior zeal and sanctity. Who has ever looked into the interior of religious societies, and not seen the same undue preference to some preachers, and contempt of others, as disgraced the Corinthian Church in the days of Paul? Who has not discovered many a Demas, who "loves this present world," and foregoes his spiritual advantages with a view to increase his gains[c]? It would be well if even the base crimes of falsehood, and overreaching, and dishonesty were not sometimes found in the skirts of those who would be thought to have kept their garments clean; yea, if intemperance also and uncleanness did not give the lie to their profession. But the more we inspect the sanctuary of God, the more we shall see occasion for humiliation and grief on account of many, who "have a name to live, but are dead;" and who, through their misconduct, "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." And such may well expect that "judgment shall begin with them[d]." We need scarcely add, that evils prevail also *in the heart* even of true believers. Paul himself confessed, that there was "a law in his members warring against the law

[c] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [d] Compare ver. 6. with 1 Pet. iv. 17.

of his mind, and sometimes bringing him into captivity to the law of sin in his members:" and the more conversant we are with our own hearts, the more we shall bewail our innumerable short-comings and defects. Our impatience, our distrust of God, our unbelief, our obduracy, our sloth, our coldness in duties, our sad mixture of principle even in our better actions; our want of love to the Saviour, our want of compassion for our fellow-creatures, our want of zeal for God; alas! alas! our want of every thing that is good, may well make the very best of us "sigh and cry," and, like Paul, to account ourselves "less than the least of all saints," or rather as "the chief of sinners."]

To bewail these abominations is characteristic of every child of God—

[Hear how Moses lamented them in his day[e]: how David also[f], and Ezra, bewailed them[g]: what extreme heaviness the Apostle Paul felt in his soul on this account[h]; and especially *in relation to those very evils which we have specified as obtaining amongst the professing people of God*[i]! And where is the saint in all the Bible who did not "groan within himself" on account of the burthen of his own in-dwelling corruptions[k]? The more any person knows of God and of his own soul, the more disposed he is to say with Job, "Behold, I am vile[l]!"

Before we proceed to the second point for our consideration, let us examine ourselves, whether these things are a burthen to us, yea, our chief burthen[m]? — — — We have no pretensions to true religion, any farther than we answer to this character of mourners on account of sin — — —]

From marking thus minutely the character of the Lord's people, we proceed to notice,

II. Their privilege—

God sets a mark on every one of his people, a mark on their foreheads, whereby they are infallibly known to him, and shall assuredly be screened from the destroying angels. They shall be protected,

1. Here—

[The deliverance of Noah from the Deluge, and of Lot from Sodom, shews not only what deliverances God *can* vouchsafe to his chosen people, but what *may be expected* by all who *mourn over*, and *labour to counteract*, the abominations that are around them[n]. In Babylon, God interposed to effect a

[e] Deut. ix. 18, 19. [f] Ps. cxix. 53, 136. [g] Ezra ix. 3, 5.
[h] Rom. ix. 1, 2. [i] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [k] Rom. viii. 23.
[l] Job xl. 4. [m] Zeph. iii. 18. Jer. xiii. 17. Rom. vii. 24.
[n] 2 Pet. ii. 5—9.

literal accomplishment of this prophetic vision; obtaining liberty for Jeremiah, and others of his believing people, whilst the unbelieving part were visited with the heaviest calamities[o]. And at the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the disciples of Christ were rescued, as it were by miracle, from all the horrors of the siege, whilst their unhappy and devoted brethren were left to experience such troubles as never came upon any other nation under heaven.

But, if God do not see fit to exempt his people from the calamities that fall on others, he will so support them under their trials, and so sanctify to them their afflictions, that they shall be constrained to say, "It was good for them to have been afflicted." He will enable them to "glory in tribulations," and to "take pleasure in distresses," as fruits of his paternal love, and as means of furthering in their souls the purposes of his grace.]

2. Hereafter—

[The seal which God has set in their foreheads will distinguish them from all others, as clearly as sheep are distinguished from goats. Nor will there be any danger of mistake in any instance whatever. In Egypt the destroying angel did not smite one house whereon the blood of the Paschal lamb was sprinkled; nor will the judgments of God fall on one individual, who has laid to heart the abominations of Israel. "God has set them apart for himself;" and for him they shall be preserved. No evil shall "come near to him who has the mark in his forehead." Whilst "fire and brimstone are rained" down upon all others without distinction, these will be safely lodged in God's holy mountain, beyond the reach or possibility of harm.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think lightly of sin—

[By many it is thought a mark of weakness to sigh and cry for the sins of others, or even for our own[p]. But let those who have such light thoughts of sin, consider *what sin has done*, in this world, and especially in the world to come. What innumerable evils have existed, and do yet exist, throughout the world! yet is there not one in the whole creation, which is not the fruit of sin. And if we could obtain one sight of those dreary mansions, where fallen angels, together with all who have perished in their sins, abide; or could hear but one groan of a damned soul; we should no more account sin a light matter: no indeed, it is "fools only, who make a mock at sin." If this do not suffice, let such an

[o] Jer. xv. 11. and xxxix. 11, 12.

[p] See their character drawn: Amos vi. 1, 3, 5, 6.

one consider, *what has been done to expiate sin.* Go, sinner, to Gethsemane, go to Calvary, and contemplate the agonies and death of your incarnate God; and then say, Whether sin be not a tremendous evil, for which no sighs or tears can ever be sufficient? But, without extending our thoughts to subjects so much beyond our reach, let us only observe *what have been the feelings of persons when once they were brought to a just sense of their sins:* let us hear the bitter lamentations of Peter, or the heart-rending cries of the converts on the day of Pentecost; and we shall no longer doubt what ought to be our views of sin, by whomsoever it may have been committed, whether by ourselves or others. Sure we are, that in the last day there will be no diversity of sentiment respecting this: the glorified saints, and the condemned sinners, will have but one view of this matter, O that *now*, even *now*, the judgment of every one amongst us might be rectified; and that, before another day, God might see reason to set his mark upon us, as "mourners in Zion!"]

2. To those who answer to the character described in our text—

[Persons who sigh and cry on account of sin, are apt to yield too much to desponding fears. But they have in reality abundant cause for joy and gratitude: for if, on the one hand, they be greatly burthened on account of sin, they have, on the other hand, reason to rejoice that sin is their burthen. Instead of being in so deplorable a state as they imagine, they are in a state most pleasing to God, and most profitable to themselves. So pleased is God with those "who are poor and of a contrite spirit," that his eyes are fixed upon them with the utmost complacency and delight[q]: and the Lord Jesus, the Judge of quick and dead, repeatedly declares them blessed[r]. Let not any one therefore be dejected because of the depths of depravity which he sees within him; but let him rather conclude, that God has discovered to him these hidden abominations; and let him beg of God to give him a clearer and fuller insight into them; that so his humiliation may be more deep, his faith more simple, his gratitude more lively, and his devotedness to God more entire. Nor let any one be afraid of seeing thus the corruptions of his heart: for, if only our self-knowledge drive us to Christ, and endear him to our souls, it will prove a source of every virtue; of contrition, of fear, of dependence on Christ, of love to his name, and of zeal for his glory. A sense of our necessities will make us cry unto him for the gift of his Spirit; and by that Spirit we shall be "*sealed* unto the day of redemption," and "rendered meet for our heavenly inheritance."

[q] Isai. lxvi. 2. [r] Matt. v. 3, 4.

OUTLINE NO. 1100

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD.

Ezek. xi. 5. *I know the things which come into your mind, every one of them.*

THERE is much of atheism in the heart of man. The language of every one, in the secret of his own bosom, is, "The Lord doth not see, neither will the Almighty regard it[a]." Doubtless this argues more than brutish stupidity[b]: but still it prevails to an awful extent, even over those who have the best means of instruction. The Prophet Ezekiel had reason to complain of it in his day; and, for the purpose of counteracting it, he declared from God to all the rulers of the Jewish people, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them."

That we may all be suitably affected with this thought, I will,

I. Establish the assertion in our text—

There is no man who does not consider God as approving or disapproving of his conduct according to the testimony which his conscience gives respecting it[c]: and this universal conviction respecting the omniscience of the Deity is, though not a demonstration, yet certainly a strong *presumptive proof*, that God is omniscient. But his omniscience may be certainly inferred,

1. From the law he has given us—

[The law, not by construction only[d], but in plain terms, takes cognizance of the secrets of the heart. But to what purpose is such a law given, if God be not able to enforce it? Or how can he enforce it, if any motion of the heart be hid from him?]

2. From the plain declarations of Holy Writ—

[These are numberless. Hear in what terms God himself appeals to the whole world respecting it: "Am I a God at hand, and not afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places

[a] Ps. xciv. 7. [b] Ps. xciv. 8, 9. [c] 1 John iii. 20, 21.
[d] Matt. v. 28. [e] Rom. vii. 7.

that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord[f]." The whole of the 139th Psalm is written for the confirmation and illustration of this truth; which Job also was persuaded of in his inmost soul: "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee[g]." But we have an illustration of it in the New Testament which is worthy of more particular notice: "All things," says the Apostle, "are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do[h]." Here the writer refers to a fact well known to the Hebrews. When a sacrifice was to be offered, not only was it examined externally, to see whether there were any blemish in it, but it was flayed, and cut down the back-bone, and laid open, that so its inward parts might be inspected by the priest. Thus are the inmost recesses of our soul both naked and opened before our God, and not an "imagination of the thoughts of our heart" concealed from him.]

3. From the appointment of a day of judgment to judge the world—

[To what purpose can such an appointment be, if God do not behold every secret of the heart? The true quality of our actions depends chiefly on the motives and principles from which they spring. But nothing short of omniscience can discover these: and hence God asserts his omniscience in reference to this very day: "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.[i]"]

Not to multiply proofs of so clear a point, let me proceed to,

II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it—

The subject being as important as any that can occupy the human mind, I will endeavour to improve it,

1. In a way of general reflections—

[In the contemplation of God's omniscience, we cannot but be struck with the thought of *God's wonderful patience and forbearance.* If only the actions of men were discerned by him, there were abundantly sufficient every day and hour to provoke him to wrath, and to bring down on the whole world the judgments which desolated the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But he sees all the motives and principles of men,

[f] Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.
[g] Job xlii. 2.
[h] Heb. iv. 13.
[i] Jer. xvii. 10.

and all the hidden abominations which are indulged in their hearts: and yet he bears with us, and waits to be gracious to every returning penitent. O let us be sensible of our obligations to him, and "let his goodness lead us to repentance[k]."

Nor shall we be less struck with *the erroneousness of the judgment which many form of their state before him.* Many judge of themselves only by their acts, whilst in their hearts, if they would but watch the motions of them, they might find abominations without number. Well does Solomon say, "There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness[l]." But let it be remembered that an angry thought is murder, and an impure look adultery, and the only contention amongst us will be, who shall take the lowest place.

Nearly connected with this is the thought of *the awful disclosures which will be made in the day of judgment.* If we look back only upon our own lives we shall see enough to fill us with shame and confusion of face: What then will be the feelings of the whole assembled universe, when the thoughts of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the whole aggregate of iniquity that has ever been either acted or conceived be made to appear in one collective mass! Ah! the whited sepulchres that will then be opened, and the lothesome abominations that will be exposed to view! In those indeed who have obtained mercy of the Lord, the exposure will only call forth songs of praise and thanksgiving: but to those who have died in their sins, the anguish will be inconceivable: and glad would they be if rocks or mountains could fall upon them, to hide them from the shame with which they will be overwhelmed[m].]

2. In a way of more particular address—

[*Tremble,* my beloved brethren, *for your past sins:* for not one shall be concealed in that day, unless indeed through the tender mercy of our God it have been blotted out of the book of God's remembrance — — — The evil of our thoughts, no less than of our acts, must be accounted for[n]. *Wash* too *in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood.* If so much as one sin be left for you to answer for, it were better for you that you had never been born. Nor ever imagine that the tears of penitence can wash away sin: there is no fountain for you but that which was once opened on the cross for sin and for uncleanness. It is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from sin: but "*that* can cleanse from all sin." At the same time *guard against the incursion of sin in future,* even in thought. Already are our sins more in number than the sands upon the sea-shore; and shall we yet be adding to the mighty load?

[k] Rom. ii. 4.
[l] Prov. xxx. 12.
[m] Dan. xii. 2.
[n] Acts viii. 22.

Have we not rendered ourselves sufficiently lothesome in the eyes of a holy God? Let us never forget that "his very name is, Thou God seest me[o]." But not to act from a mere servile fear, *labour to approve yourselves to God in the whole course of your lives.* Let your actions, words, and thoughts be such as the heart-searching God will approve[p]. Then will he bear testimony to you as "Israelites indeed in whom was no guile;" and he who has beheld your most secret thoughts will, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, applaud and "reward you openly."]

[o] Gen. xvi. 13. [p] Prov. iv. 23.

OUTLINE NO. 1101

DEPARTURE OF GOD FROM HIS TEMPLE.

Ezek. xi. 23. *And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.*

THE vision with which the Prophet Ezekiel was favoured, and which he records in the first chapter, is of very difficult interpretation. In it there were represented to his view four living creatures, all moved and actuated by the Spirit of God[a]; there were also wheels moved by them[b], and the glory of God was enthroned above them[c]. The general import of this vision we apprehend to be, that the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministration of angels and holy men devoted to his service, manages every thing for the good of his Church. But from the eighth chapter God shews, that when his people shall provoke him by their impieties, he will withdraw from them, and give them up to all those judgments which their iniquities have deserved. This is at first but slightly intimated[d]; but in our text it is actually carried into effect. *The manner in which his departure took place,* is deserving of particular attention. It was by several successive steps; the bright cloud, which was the symbol of his presence, and which is here called "his glory," left the accustomed place of its

[a] Ezek. i. 4—14. [b] Ezek. i. 15—21.
[c] Ezek. i. 26—28. [d] Ezek. viii. 6

residence between the cherubims, and descended "to the threshold of the house[e]." From thence it moved to the court of the temple, which was on the north side, whither the cherubims had already moved[f]. After that, it went to the door of the last gate, attended both by the cherubims and the wheels[g]. Then, lastly, with the cherubims and the wheels, it deserted the city altogether, and went to the mountain on the east side of the city[h]. What was the design of God in all these gradual removes, but to manifest the reluctance with which he yields to the necessity imposed upon him, of leaving his people to the ruin they have merited?

Hence then we take occasion to shew,

I. How averse God is to forsake his people—

Look we to his declarations?

[What can be more express than his assertion, yea, his oath, that he "has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live[i]?" How pathetically does he lament the obstinacy of those who withstand all the influences, and defeat all the purposes of his grace: "How long shall it be ere ye attain to innocency?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be[k]?" The idea of abandoning his people seems almost to overwhelm him: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim[l]?" But of all the passages in Holy Writ in which the Divine compassion towards obstinate offenders shines forth, there is none that exceeds the lamentation of our blessed Lord over Jerusalem; "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things belonging to thy peace!" "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"]

Look we to examples?

[What more astonishing than the forbearance of God towards the antediluvian world during the space of one hundred and twenty years? Mark his patience also towards his

[e] Ezek. ix. 3.
[f] Ezek. x. 3, 4, 18. The word "*went*," ver. 4. should rather be, "*had gone*."
[g] Ezek. x. 19. [h] Ezek. xi. 22, 23. [i] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[k] Jer. xiii. 27. [l] Hos. xi. 8. See also Ps. lxxxi. 13—16.

people in the wilderness, where for forty years their conduct was one continued scene of murmuring and rebellion. Even towards the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Messiah, he commanded his messages of mercy to be delivered in the first place: that city which had exceeded all others in iniquity was to be the most favoured of any in the whole universe, by the united labours of all the Apostles. But we need no further proof of God's backwardness to cast off his people, than what we may all find in our own bosoms. We all are living monuments of his patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance. If his compassions had not been infinite, not one of us would have been here this day, to speak or hear of them.]

True it is, that "his Spirit will not always strive with men:" but yet he does not abandon them at once; as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. What are the different steps by which his approaching departure may be discovered.

God "has pleasure in the prosperity of his people:" but, when constrained to leave them, he manifests his anger gradually, in order to awaken them to repentance, and to prevent the execution of his severer judgments. He withholds,

1. The manifestations of his love—

[Whilst his people conduct themselves in a becoming manner, he delights in every possible exercise of mercy towards them. He "draws nigh to them," and "lifts up the light of his countenance upon them," and "sheds abroad his love in their hearts," and testifies to them of their adoption, and "witnesses with their spirits that they are his." But when they draw back from him, he withholds from them these gracious communications. They now pray indeed, but find not a present and prayer-answering God: they read also, but feel not that power and sweetness in the word which they once did: they attend ordinances, but find them not, as once, to be "the gate of heaven." The sun is hid behind a cloud; and they are no longer animated with his cheering rays: "I hid me," says God, "and was wroth, because they went on frowardly in the way of their hearts."

Inquire, then, beloved, whether any such calamity as this is come upon you? If it be, know that this is God's first step towards a final departure; and if you do not arrest his progress by penitence and a renewal of your first works[m], he will

[m] Rev. ii. 5. and iii. 3.

go yet farther from you, and be brought back again to you with ten-fold difficulty. If you have lost the cheering presence of your God, know that he has already gone "to the threshold of the house."]

2. The influences of his grace—

[God is pleased to strengthen his people with might by his Spirit in their inward man, so that they are enabled to overcome the world, to mortify the flesh; and to withstand all the principalities and powers of hell. He endues them with grace sufficient for them: but, if they are unfaithful to the grace received, he will withdraw it, and leave them to the unassisted efforts of their own arm. Then, like Samson with his locks shorn, they will become weak as other men: the world will regain its ascendant over them: their natural propensities will return with renewed force: and Satan will be able so to practise his former wiles, as to gain the most fatal advantage over them. They are like Israel before Ai, because of the Achan in their camp[n].

Here then is another subject of inquiry for us. Do we find that we are less able than formerly to resist our besetting sins? that we have less power to repress the workings of evil tempers, and of corrupt affections? Do we find that duty is more difficult than in former times, and sin more easy and pleasant? ——— Then we may know that God has gone, not to the threshold only, but even to the court. O fearful state! What cries, and tears, and labours, become the person that is reduced to it! He has not a moment to spare: if he would not lose God speedily and for ever, he must humble himself before God in dust and ashes: he must "repent and turn himself from all his transgressions, else his iniquity will become his ruin."]

3. The warnings of his Spirit—

[The conscience of one that lives nigh to God is made tender, as the apple of his eye: and if by any means he be betrayed into sin, he mourns, and weeps, and never finds a moment's rest, till he has "washed it away in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." But this sensibility is soon lost: it is God's presence only that preserves it: and if God's "Holy Spirit be quenched by us, he will give us over to a hardness of heart," so that the things which once would have occasioned the deepest humiliation, shall now scarcely produce a sigh.

And can it be, that any one is so far left, as to have his eyes blinded as to the malignity of sin, and his conscience

seared as to the commission of it? — — — Yes: there are many who are thus beguiled by Satan from the simplicity that is in Christ;" and they have reason to fear that God will speedily take his flight, and execute that threat, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." Verily, "there is but a step between them and death."]

This leads us to set before you,

III. The dreadful state of those who are forsaken by him—

"Woe unto them," says God, "when I depart from them[o]!" yes, woe unto them indeed; for,

1. They are delivered up into the hands of their spiritual enemies—

[As, when Jesus had departed from Mount Olivet *(the very mountain on which the glory of God abode, when it had forsaken the temple and city)* that began to be fulfilled, "Your house is left unto you desolate:" and when, "by grieving and vexing the Holy Spirit we have provoked him to become our enemy," our case is become altogether desperate: he says concerning us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone." Then "the evil spirit that had been driven out, taketh to him seven other spirits to occupy our hearts;" and our "last state becomes worse than the first." Not that such a person must necessarily be given over to gross and open vice: he may be left under the power of pride and infidelity, or of terror and despondency, or of hardness and obduracy: but, to whatever he is left a prey, "God swears in his wrath, that he shall never enter into his rest."

2. They live only to increase their guilt and misery—

[Every day they live, they only augment the measure of their iniquities: and, strange as it may seem, immediate death, though attended with immediate damnation, would be to them a mercy. In one view indeed, the shortest respite from death may appear a blessing: and so it would be, if they were not sealed up under condemnation: but, being "given over to a reprobate mind," they live only "to heap up misery against the last days," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Unhappy soul, whoever thou art, when thus forsaken by thy God! "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."]

We will conclude this subject with answering two QUESTIONS—

[o] Hos. ix. 12.

1. How are we to reconcile this doctrine with other parts of Scripture?

[It is certain that the Scriptures speak much respecting the determination of God never to forsake his people[p]———— And we believe that God will fulfil his promises, and that not one of them shall ever fail. But there are passages equally strong on the other side[q]; and they in their place need equally to be enforced. The former are necessary to encourage hope: the latter, to excite our fear. The truth is, we apprehend, that no person is warranted in believing himself a child of God, *any farther than* he has an evidence of it in the conformity of his soul to the will of his heavenly Father. With the progress of sanctification his confidence may well increase; but with a declension in sanctity there ought to be a proportionable relaxation of his confidence. When therefore he is in a truly spiritual state, he may fitly be carried forward on the wings of hope, and love, and peace, and joy: but when he declines from that state, he needs the quickening influence of jealousy and fear: and, if any "turn back unto perdition," they then prove to the world, that their former confidence was delusive; and we must say of them, as St. John does, "They went out from us; but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us[r]."

If men would receive *the whole* word of God, without contending for human systems, they would find no such contradictions as they are apt to imagine: or, if they found some expressions which they knew not how to reconcile with others, they would at least learn to exercise candour towards those who differed from them, and to leave the full explanation of these hidden mysteries till the day when God himself shall cast the true light upon them. Our concern is, not so much to reconcile the difficulties of Scripture, as to learn from every part its appropriate instruction, and its legitimate use.]

2. How are we to avert this awful calamity?

[We should mark with extreme care the very first motions of the Deity that indicate his displeasure. The occasional hidings of his face should lead us to inquire, what there has been amiss within us, what neglects or miscarriages that have grieved his Holy Spirit. We should instantly betake ourselves to fasting and prayer, entreating him to "shew us, wherefore

p 1 Sam. xii. 22. Isai. liv. 9, 10. Jer. xxxii. 40. Heb. xiii. 5.
q 2 Chron. xv. 2. 1 Cor. ix. 27. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.
r 1 John ii. 19.

he contendeth with us?" Like Jacob, we should "wrestle with him all the night, and say, I will not let thee go until thou bless me:" and, having regained his presence, we should labour constantly to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." Were we thus to exert ourselves in the first instance, we should walk continually, as it were, in the light of his countenance: but if we disregard the first intimations of his displeasure, and suffer him to depart, from his throne to the threshold, from the threshold to the court, from the court to the gate, we shall find it no easy matter to recover the testimonies of his love, and the influences of his grace. "Be instructed then, (says the Lord,) lest my soul depart from thee[s]." Be instructed in the necessity of unintermitted watchfulness and prayer. Be instructed to "guard against the very appearance of evil," on your own part, and against the smallest withdrawment on the part of God. Thus will your whole life be a continual feast; and God will be greatly glorified in the whole of your conversation.]

[s] Jer. vi. 8.

OUTLINE NO. 1102

DEATH AND ETERNITY NEAR AT HAND.

Ezek. xii. 23. *The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.*

EXCEEDINGLY diversified were the ways by which God communicated his mind to his ancient people. At Mount Sinai he spake to them by an audible voice, and by legible characters engraven on tables of stone. To the high-priest he imparted the knowledge of his will, by means of the Urim and Thummim, which constituted his breast-plate. To the prophets he revealed himself by dreams, and visions, and inward inspiration. The Prophet Ezekiel was favoured with many and most extraordinary visions; some of which were very obscure; whilst others were either manifest in themselves, or were made clear by a special revelation of their import. On many occasions the prophets were directed to make use of some significant actions, which were to convey to the people a knowledge of the events which awaited them. Of this last kind was the revelation now made to them by the Prophet Ezekiel. Many of the Jews had been

carried captive to Babylon. But, because there yet remained in Judæa a king of their own nation, the people who lived under him thought that he would protect them from any fresh invasion, and even liberate their captive brethren also from the Chaldean yoke. But they continued to rebel against God as much as ever; and God therefore warned them, that all of them, both king and people, should go into captivity. Such warnings they had often received from the mouths of other prophets; and because God had exercised forbearance towards them, they thought that the threatened judgments should never be executed, or, at all events, not be executed in their day. This even passed into a proverb among them; so that it became a common saying among them, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth[a]." But, in opposition to this, the prophet was ordered to exhibit before them, in his own person, a representation of the impending judgments; and to announce to them God's determination to inflict them speedily: "Say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision."

In improving this subject, there are two things to be noticed:

I. The tidings here announced—

These, as I have observed, were, that "the proverb which they had used should cease;" and that all the judgments which God's servants had from time to time denounced against that people should speedily be accomplished.

Now, similar tidings I have to announce to you. Concerning you, also, have many visions been revealed—

[You have been warned, times without number, that God hateth, and will punish, sin. You have been told, that death will arrest you, and carry you into the presence of your God; that, according to your state before him, God will deal with you in a way of judgment or of mercy; and that the state in which you will then be fixed, will abide for ever — - - - -]

[a] ver. 22.

But you have disregarded them, even as the Jews of old did—

[Some will go so far as to say, that "these visions will fail," and never be accomplished. Others of a less daring habit, who would not venture thus flatly to contradict the word of God, will yet divest it of all its power, by supposing that it refers to other times and other persons, rather than to themselves at this time: "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are afar off[b]." If a man, duly authorized, were to come and arrest us for any crime, we should feel a *personal* interest in all that he said: but when the plainest and most pointed truths are spoken to us from the Lord, we hear them as if we had no *personal* concern in them whatever; and are no more affected with them, than we should be with a relation of some events which had occurred, or were about to occur, in some foreign nation with which we were personally unconnected — — —]

I must however declare to you, that "the days are at hand, for every vision of God's word to take effect"—

[Death and judgment are not far off from any of us: for what is the longest life, when viewed in connexion with eternity? But how few, in comparison, live to an advanced age? yea, what multitudes are cut off in the very prime of life! and what a change in a congregation does a few years effect! and, when "our day is come, has not every vision its full effect?" Go, and see whether God's word was not verified towards the Jews in Babylon. God himself put it to their descendants, in a way of solemn appeal, "My words, and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, *did they not take hold of your fathers?* To which they were constrained to reply, "Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, *so hath he dealt with us*[c]." And so also shall his every word *take hold of* you, and be fulfilled in you. Think what ye will of his long-suffering and forbearance, if ye continue to disregard his warnings, know of a surety, that "your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not[d]" — — —]

But these tidings will appear in all their force, if we mark,

II. The sign by which they were confirmed—

The prophet was commanded to dig through the wall of his house, and carry out his furniture upon

[b] ver. 27. [c] Zech. i. 6. [d] 2 Pet. ii. 3 and iii. 9, 10.

his shoulders in their sight, and, as through excess of grief, to cover his face, so as not to see the ground; in order to shew the people what should be done by them, both king and people, in their approaching siege and captivity[e]. Thus "he was to them as a sign[f]."

And have we no sign, confirming God's word to us?

[Yes, (*the departed year* is a sign to us; or *our departed brother* is a sign to us;) every person who dies around us, and every sound of his funeral knell, is a sign to us, that the visions of God are taking effect, and that soon they shall take effect with respect to us. We may, in our imagination, "put the evil day far from us;" but every day and hour brings it nearer to us: and when "the day is fully come," not all the universe can arrest the hand of death, or protract our existence here one single moment. Then, whatever be our age, whatever our rank, or *whatever interest the whole nation may have in our life*[g] — — — we must obey our summons, and go into the presence of our God. Prepared or unprepared, we must stand naked before him, and receive from him that doom which his word has taught us to expect — — — I say again, therefore, to you, that every person that is called into the eternal world is precisely such a sign to you as Ezekiel was to the Jews—a sign that the visions of God are true, and that "*every one* of them, in due season, shall take effect."]

And now, what ENCOURAGEMENT had the prophet to discharge his painful office? It was but *a peradventure*: "*It may be* they will consider[h]. With that humble, but feeble hope[i], I address you, my Brethren.

1. It *may be* that some of you will consider—

[O that God would incline your hearts to consider all the visions which from time to time are set before you! Truly, not one has ever been kept back from you: no; "I have declared unto you, as far as I have been able, the whole counsel of God." Your lost estate has been set before you with all fidelity; and the way of salvation proclaimed to you, in all its freeness, in all its fulness, in all its excellency: and that record has been explained to you in an infinite diversity of ways, that

[e] ver. 3—12. [f] ver. 6, 11.

[g] It was preached in Jan. 1827, on account of the death of the Duke of York.

[h] ver. 3. [i] 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

"He who hath the Son, hath life, and he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life[k]." "The *effects*, too, of these visions" have been set before you, by an exhibition, so far as I was able, of all the blessedness of heaven, and of all the misery of hell. Now, then, consider these things, I pray you. Consider *your own personal interest* in them. Consider in what light you will view them the very instant that your soul is separated from your body: and now, so lay them to heart, that they may prove effectual for your conversion to God, and for the everlasting salvation of your souls — — —]

2. It *may be*, however, and I fear *will be*, that the great mass of you will not consider—

[When I look back, and see how little fruit all my past instructions have produced, I cannot but fear that this will share the same fate as they; and in the space of one hour, or, at all events of one day, be altogether forgotten. Not that they will be forgotten by God, in whose name they are delivered: for they are all recorded in the book of his remembrance, and will rise up in judgment against those who have failed to improve them. Why, my Brethren, will you make so light of these things, which yet you believe to be of everlasting moment, and which God makes known to you by me for the eternal welfare of your souls? I tremble to think, that, at this very instant, whilst I am addressing these things to you for your good, I am eventually only sinking many of you into deeper perdition. O that God would awaken you to a sense of your condition, ere it be too late[l]! O that *so much as one* of you would arise from his stupor, and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will!" Let me not, my Brethren, be disappointed of *this* hope: but go home, and fall upon your knees before God, and pray to him, that, whatever other "rebels" may do, *you* may "be wise, and consider your latter end."]

[k] 1 John v. 11, 12.

[l] See Zeph. i. 12. with Ezek. vii. 5—9. which, though primarily applicable to temporal judgments, may be addressed to a soul in this state.

OUTLINE NO. 1103

DELUSIVE CONFIDENCE REPROVED.

Ezek. xiii. 10—12. *Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered*

mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an over-flowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?

SO deeply is unbelief rooted in the heart of man, that scarcely any testimony from God is ever received with the confidence it deserves. This appears throughout all the sacred history: and our own lives are one continued exemplification of it. To his people of old God was pleased to give many repeated warnings of the judgments that were coming upon them: but the assertions of false prophets were always credited, in opposition to the declarations of God himself. By the Prophet Ezekiel God forewarned the people of the captivity to which they would soon be reduced by their Chaldean invaders. He directed the prophet to set before their eyes symbolic representations of the calamities that awaited them; to dig through the wall of his house, and carry forth his goods by night, and to eat bread, and drink water, with quaking and trembling[a]. But false prophets persuaded the people that they had no cause for alarm; for that these signs related to distant times; and that there would soon be an end of the impending dangers. It seems that some, women, as well as men, conspired thus to counteract the influence of God's word upon the people; and that they sewed pillows to the arm-holes, or elbows, of persons, and covered their heads with kerchiefs, in order to intimate to them, that they might repose themselves in perfect ease and safety. To reprove these persons, and to confirm his former assertions, is the prophet's object in the chapter before us. He compares the men to persons building an ill-constructed wall, and daubing it with untempered mortar, which would be washed away by the first shower; and to the women he declares, that God would soon tear from the arms of their deluded followers the emblems of their delusion.

[a] See the whole preceding chapter.

and undeceive those whom they had so fatally led astray[b].

But it is not our intention to confine our remarks to that particular occasion. Similar conduct obtains amongst us at this day; and it calls for similar reproof. We propose therefore to consider,

I. Who are obnoxious to this reproof—

All ranks and orders of men who attempt to invalidate the messages of the Most High, are guilty of the evil here spoken of. It is justly imputable to,

1. Unfaithful ministers—

[Not only amongst the Jews, but even in the Christian Church, there were many, who, professing themselves to be ambassadors of heaven, were only deceivers of the people[c]. Their habit has at all times been, to "say, Peace, peace, when there was no peace[d]. Would to God that none of this character yet existed in the world! But are there not still some who keep out of view the desperate depravity of the human heart, the absolute necessity of a new birth, the impossibility of being saved by any righteousness of our own, and the duty of giving up ourselves wholly and unreservedly to God as his redeemed people? ——— Are there not those who decry these things as enthusiasm; and who tell their hearers, that there is a smoother and an easier way to heaven than what the Scriptures have marked out? ——— If then such persons exist, say whether they do not resemble the prophets and the prophetesses spoken of in our text? ———]

2. Unbelieving people—

[Whether seduced by others or not, all are prone of themselves to speak peace unto their own souls: they will not receive the declarations of God concerning them: they cannot endure to think that they are in such danger as God's word declares them to be; or that the way to heaven is so strait and narrow as his Gospel represents it. They substitute some terms of their own in the place of those which God has prescribed; and they persuade themselves that they shall be saved at last, though they conform themselves in no respect either to the principles or practice of the Christian code ——— Are not these then daubing their wall with untempered mortar, and sewing to their arms pillows which shall be rent away? ———]

[b] See the whole chapter.

[c] 2 Cor. xi. 13. Gal. i. 6—8. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

[d] ver. 10. with Jer. vi. 14.

Let us then proceed to notice,

II. The warning here given them—

Their labour is, alas! and must ever be, in vain: it will end,

1. In certain and bitter disappointment—

[Their wall will surely fall: and shall it not then be said to them, "Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" Sad indeed will be the reproaches which both the deceivers and the deceived will cast on each other: the one will say, Why did ye mislead me? the others will say, Why did ye believe me in preference to the word of God? Sad reflections too will all cast upon themselves: Why did I set up my own opinion against the most express declarations of my God? — — — The very disappointment which the Jews experienced, when Ezekiel's prophecies were verified in the destruction of their city, and in their own captivity, will ere long be realized by all who now buoy themselves up with their own delusions. If they should entreat their God to give them an opportunity of undeceiving their surviving relatives, the answer will be, No: they have Moses and the Prophets; and if they will not attend to their voice, they must receive their deserved recompence.]

2. In irremediable and endless ruin—

[No further means of salvation will be afforded them. Their day of grace is irrecoverably gone: their state is fixed for ever. O to what anguish of heart are they now a prey! What weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth do they now experience, under a sense of God's wrath, and in the prospect of its everlasting duration! This must assuredly be the end of all our self-deception. As "Ezekiel was a sign to the Jews[e]," so have we signs in plenty, that the threatened vengeance shall come[f], and that they who will not believe God's word shall find it true at the last[g] — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. To careless sinners—

[You will persuade yourselves that no evil consequence shall arise to you from your neglect of God and of your own souls. But will God falsify his word to save you? Do not entertain so vain, so impious, a thought. He will not, he cannot, deny himself: nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail — — —]

[e] Ezek. xii. 11.

[f] 1 Cor. x. 5—11. 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. Jude, ver. 6, 7. "Set forth for an example."

[g] Jer. xliv. 28.

2. To self-complacent formalists—

[You profess to reverence the word of God, and to comply with its commands: but, whilst you rest in mere forms and ceremonies of religion, you greatly err. God requires the religion of the heart: you must have "the power of godliness as well as its form." The wall that you are constructing may look fair to the eye; but it will not stand: it is raised on a sandy foundation: it is formed of bad materials: it wants the cement of the Spirit: the showers shall soon wash off its external covering; and the stormy wind shall scatter the loose materials: in the name of God we declare to you, that "it shall fall." Nothing will ever stand, but that which is laid on Christ as the foundation, and has all the graces of the Spirit for its superstructure — — —]

3. To inconsistent professors—

[Be it granted, that, as far as relates to your views of the Gospel, you are right: still we must look to the effects of the Gospel on your heart and life; and must declare unto you, that, if you do not manifest by your life and conversation that you have "the same mind as was in Christ," you only deceive your own souls: you may have a faith indeed; but it is no better than the faith of devils. From this point we cannot recede a hair's breadth. We do not say that you must possess sinless perfection; for then who could be saved? But we say, that no sin must have allowed, or habitual, dominion over you: the right eye, or right hand, if knowingly retained contrary to the will of God, will as effectually cast you into perdition, as any number of sins whatever: your condemnation indeed may be increased by a multitude of sins; but it will not be rendered more certain, than it is by one reigning sin. O that those who are worldly-minded, or covetous, or proud, or passionate, or impure, or slothful, or addicted to any one sinful disposition, would consider this! God says, By their fruits ye shall know them: and by their fruits they shall be known. If ever we would be Christ's, we must "walk as Christ walked."]

OUTLINE NO. 1104

HEART IDOLATRY CONDEMNED.

Ezek. xiv. 4. *Thus saith the Lord God: Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.*

IT is gratifying to see the ordinances of religion well attended — — — but it is painful to reflect how few there are who derive any saving benefit from them; or rather, how many there are who find them, not a savour of life unto life, but rather a savour of death unto their deeper condemnation — — — If we inquire into the reason of this, we must trace it, not to the word itself, (for that, if dispensed aright, is quick and powerful, as in the days of old,) but to the manner in which the ordinances are attended. Men come up to the House of God, just as the Elders of Israel came before the Prophet Ezekiel, with idols in their hearts; and, being unwilling to part with them, they provoke God to withhold from them his blessing, without which not the ministry of Paul himself could be of any avail.

In the case of Ezekiel's hearers, we see,

I. What inconsistencies are found in the Church of God—

One would have supposed that these Elders of Israel would either have renounced Jehovah altogether, or have put away the idols which estranged their hearts from him. But they wished to keep up an appearance of godliness in the midst of all their impiety; and therefore came to the prophet for instruction, at the very time that they addicted themselves to the worship of their idols.

Thus it is that men come up to the house of God at this day: they cannot altogether renounce their profession of regard for God; but,

1. They set up idols in their hearts—

[The cares and pleasures of this world are as dominant in the hearts of the generality as in the heathen themselves. And a love to these is declared by God himself to be idolatry[a] — — — And shall I say that these "idols are set up in their hearts?" Yes, verily, and in their houses also: for you may live for years in the houses of the generality of Christians, and hear nothing, and see nothing, but what tends to exalt the creature above the Creator, and proves, that Mammon, rather than Jehovah, is the god whom they serve — — —]

[a] Col. iii. 5. and Phil. iii. 19.

Yet they wish to be thought the Lord's people—

[They would be indignant if they were accounted heathens. They suppose themselves to be Christians, notwithstanding they have not one real mark of Christianity about them. If a mere attendance on public ordinances would suffice, all were well: but if an inquiry be made, who or what stands highest in their regards, not the worshippers of Baal, with their vestments on, can shew more clearly "whose they are, and whom they serve." The inconsistency of the elders who came to Ezekiel, is apparent to all; but, if candidly examined, it is a perfect representation of that which is found in the great mass of Christians at the present day. In truth, the prophet himself marks the correspondence, when he says, "They came to him, as God's people came; and sat before him as God's people, and heard his words, but would not do them: for with their mouth they shewed much love; but their heart went after their covetousness[b]." A juster description of the great mass, even of the better sort of Christians, is not to be found in all the book of God.]

That we may guard you against these inconsistencies, we proceed to shew,

II. The fearful disappointment in which they will surely issue—

They cannot but be highly displeasing to a God of truth and holiness. Indeed he tells us, in our text, how such inquirers shall fare. He will answer them,

1. In a way of silent contempt—

[Amongst men, silence is often the severest answer: and such an answer shall all such worshippers receive. God even puts the question to us, "Shall I be inquired of by *them?* As I live, saith the Lord, I will not be inquired of by them[c]." Of this indignant contempt we see an instance in Saul; whom "God answered not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets[d]." And this exactly accords with the experience of multitudes, who, though they have attended the house of God ten thousand times, have never received one answer to their prayers; and, though they have as often sat before the prophets of the Lord, have never found any efficacy in the word, to convert and save their souls — — —]

2. In a way of infatuating delusion—

[They come with their prejudices and vain conceits, no one of which do they desire to have rectified and removed.

[b] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. [c] ver. 3. with Ezek. xx. 3.
[d] 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

God therefore gives them over to blindness and hardness of heart, and to the very delusions which they have chosen[e]. He has plainly declared, that he will do this "to those who love not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness: he will give them over to strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, and perish in their sins[f]." In fact, these people prefer the prophets that will deceive them[g]; and they will either be given up to the guidance which they affect[h], or be left under the influence of eyes that cannot see, and ears that cannot hear[i] — — —]

3. In a way of just and indignant reprehension—

[Against persons of this description, our blessed Lord himself, meek and lowly as he was, spake in the severest terms[k]. And, verily, God will answer them "according to the multitude of their idols;" "setting his face against them, and consigning them over to the judgments which their hypocrisy has deserved[l]. His word to them is the very reverse of that which will be uttered to his obedient people: "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: but woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given unto him[m]."]

And NOW,

1. Examine, I pray you, with what dispositions you have come hither at this time—

[In coming hither, to inquire of the Lord, have ye been sincerely desirous to know his will; and fully determined, through grace, to obey it without reserve? O! judge yourselves; for God knoweth your hearts, and his judgment will be according to truth — — —]

2. Look to it, that this message from God produce in your hearts its due effect—

[If you will approve yourselves to God, you must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls[n]" — — —]

[e] Isai. lxvi. 4.
[f] 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.
[g] Isai. xxx. 9—11. Jer. v. 31.
[h] ver. 9. with Jer. xxiii. 17, 18.
[i] Isai. vi. 9, 10. 2 Cor. iv. 4.
[k] Matt. xxiii. 13—33.
[l] ver. 8. Matt. xxiv. 31.
[m] Isai. iii. 10, 11.
[n] Jam. i. 22—25.

OUTLINE NO. 1105

THE EFFECT OF GOD'S MERCY ON THE RENEWED SOUL.

Ezek. xvi. 62, 63. *I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.*

WHOEVER attentively reads the writings of the prophets, will observe, that there is one image in particular which predominates, as it were, above all others, in representing and characterizing the departure of the soul from God; it is that of the violation of the nuptial vows. God has been pleased to speak of himself as the Husband of his Church: and hence, when his people have turned aside to idols, they are said to have "committed adultery with stocks and stones." Sometimes that idea is prosecuted with a minuteness, which, though proper for the time and occasion on which it was written, would not be suitable for an audience differently circumstanced. The Prophet Ezekiel in particular, who seems to have been a man of a severer cast, and to have been intent only on communicating his sentiments as strongly and forcibly as he could, has given himself great latitude in this respect. He is not content with using here and there a metaphorical expression; he occupies a whole chapter in drawing, as it were, a parallel between a supposed adulteress, and the Jewish people. Certainly this gives great force to his reproofs; because the minds of all are open to conviction, when truth is stated to them in a way which commends itself to their feelings and judgment. We shall not however follow him any farther than will be necessary for the elucidation of our main subject.

We should not, in the general, take occasion from the single word "*thee*" to investigate largely the character and conduct of the persons addressed: but here our subject absolutely requires that we should do so; since the whole chapter is occupied

in delineating it; and a full consideration of it is necessary, in order to the obtaining of a right understanding of our text. We propose then, from a view of our text as connected with the whole chapter, to set before you,

I. The extent of man's wickedness—

We will give, in the first place, a brief summary of the chapter—

[It is here supposed that a child, from the moment of its birth, is left exposed in an open field, without any one to pay the least attention to it; and that in that situation, where it must speedily have perished, it is noticed by Jehovah, who instantly administers to all its wants, and thus preserves its life. It is then supposed, that, after this child has been brought up by him to a mature age, she is espoused to him and becomes his wife. He, in the character of her husband, loads her with benefits, so as to make her the admiration and the envy of all who behold her. She however, instead of requiting him with that love, and honour, and fidelity that become her, abandons herself to open prostitution, and that too, not through the solicitations of others, but through the wilful depravity of her own heart; she herself being the tempter of all her paramours, and bestowing on them the gifts which her husband had conferred on her. By this licentious and infamous conduct she has compelled her husband to put her away, and to withdraw from her the means of exciting and compensating any more these iniquitous proceedings.]

Let us now mark how this image was applicable to Judah and Jerusalem—

[The Jews had been originally chosen in Abraham, their common father, when he himself was an idolater: and as soon as his posterity were multiplied in Egypt, they were reduced to such a state of destitution and misery, that they must have perished, if God himself had not miraculously interposed for them. But God had compassion on them, and brought them out with a high hand, and took them for his own peculiar people, and gave them an inheritance in the land of Canaan. There he elevated them to a high rank among the nations, insomuch that they were the envy and admiration of all who knew them; so great was their power, their opulence, their prosperity in every respect. But in time they turned from the worship of God to idols, and from confidence in God to a dependence on foreign alliances, which they sought and maintained at vast expense. "Thy renown," says the prophet, (ver. 14, 15.) "went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it

was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown." All manner of corruptions at length overspread the land, and provoked God, who was jealous for his own honour, to give them up to the desolations and miseries which they had so justly merited.]

But to us also, as well as to them, all this may be applied—

[View us *as men:* how helpless were we in our early infancy! yet through the goodness of God, who has been a father to us, we have been placed in situations of ease and honour, far beyond what, if left to ourselves without his paternal care, we could ever have obtained. God, having formed us for himself, has given us many rich endowments, such as were necessary for the filling of the situation to which he has advanced us: But what use have we made of all his gifts? Have we improved them in obedience to his will, and for the promotion of his glory? Have not our various talents, of mental energy, of bodily strength, of worldly property, been employed solely for our own personal gratification, without any regard for Him to whom they properly belonged, and for whose honour they should have been employed? Verily there has not been any idol, however base, to whose service we have not devoted these things, rather than to the service of our God.

View us *as Christians* also, and the same wickedness may justly be laid to our charge. In our natural state we were altogether guilty and polluted, yea, helpless and hopeless. But the advantages which Almighty God has conferred upon us have been exceeding great: all the ordinances of his worship, all the offers of his grace, all the hopes of his glory, have been vouchsafed to us from time to time, in order to convince us of his love, and to stimulate us to an unreserved surrender of ourselves to him. But these things, instead of having been improved aright, have actually been made the means and occasions of our departure from him. We have rested in the ordinances, without any concern whether we enjoyed God in them or not: his offers of mercy have been brought to justify the idea, that we might sin against him with impunity: and the prospects of the eternal world have been considered as little affected by our present conduct. "This has been our way from our youth;" and it is equally prevalent in every class of the community.

Would an earthly husband be satisfied with such conduct in his wife? What wonder then is it if our heavenly Husband regard these our adulteries with grief and wrathful indignation?]

But if, on the one hand, these things shew the greatness of our depravity, they serve, on the other hand, most strikingly to illustrate,

II. The exceeding riches of God's grace—

Vile as the Jews had been, he promises in our text to restore them to his favour—

[That the same persons are addressed as have been described in all the preceding context, is evident from the two verses before our text. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin having followed the Canaanites in their abominations, it is said, that "their father was an Amorite, and their mother a Hittite." Their character is then compared with that of Samaria and of Sodom (who are called their sisters), and is said to have been worse than either[a]. Yet, says God, I will restore "Sodom and her daughters (i. e. the heathen world at large), and Samaria and her daughters (i. e. the ten tribes of Israel), to their former estate;" and then, "when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger, I will give them to thee for daughters, but *not by* THY *covenant*[b]: and I will establish MY covenant with thee."

Here it is distinctly stated, that there shall be a restoration of the whole Jewish nation, together with a general conversion of the Gentiles: and that they shall be all united, not on the footing of the covenant made with the Jews on Mount Sinai, ("not by *thy* covenant,") but on the footing of the new "covenant made with them in the days of their youth," even with Abraham their father: *this* is the covenant which he would re-establish with them; and according to the tenour of it he would freely forgive all their past iniquities, and restore them to the everlasting enjoyment of his favour. By this wonderful exhibition of mercy to them, "they should know assuredly that He, even Jehovah, is the only true God;" yea moreover, that He is their God for ever and ever.

This was so very partially fulfilled at the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, that we cannot but look for a more complete fulfilment of it at a period yet future, but, we trust, not very remote.]

The promise however is, no doubt, to be extended to us also—

[However vile we may have been, God, if we seek him, will remember his holy covenant, and will accept us according to the tenour of it. In that covenant, provision is made for our every want. "It is ordered in all things and sure:" and it is *therefore* sure, because by it God gives all, and we receive all: God gives the new heart as well as pardon for past offences; and engages to make us his people, at the time that he gives himself to us as our God. Hear how plainly all this

[a] ver 45—48, 51, 52. [b] ver. 53, 55, 61, 62.

is declared in the Epistle to the Hebrews[c] — — — The very distinction is there made between the Jewish covenant that was made on Mount Sinai, and the covenant of grace which was made four hundred and thirty years before with Abraham: and the knowledge of the Lord will be universally diffused, not in theory only, but in the experience of every individual: "*for*," says God, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." This then is the promise which we now make known to you; that however you may have alienated your affections from God in times past, if you will but now return to him, your former iniquities shall no more be remembered, but God will be your God for ever and ever. O hear the very invitations of God himself[d] — — — and implore help from God to comply with them!]

But is not this a dangerous doctrine? Surely not, if we consider,

III. The effect of this grace upon every soul of man—

It is thought by those who have never experienced this grace themselves, that it must of necessity puff up with pride and conceit all who receive it. But,

This is contrary to reason—

[If we maintain that man by nature is in the situation of this outcast child; that God, purely of his own mercy and grace, "looks upon us" in that situation, and "bids us live;" if, after all our innumerable transgressions, he invites us to repent of our iniquities, and to embrace his holy covenant; we should think that there is no possible scope for pride and self-conceit; since the very mercy which God exercises towards us is not founded in any actual, or foreseen, goodness in us, but wholly in the free and sovereign exercise of God's holy will. It is the man that arrogates some goodness to himself, and makes the superior worth of the individual to be the ground of God's peculiar favour to him, *this* is the man that is proud, and that puts the very crown of Jehovah upon his own head. Even in heaven itself, if such a man were ever to reach that blessed place, he would be robbing God of his glory, and ascribing his salvation, in part at least, to his own superior goodness, which was the first moving cause of God's mercy towards him.]

It is contrary to fact also—

[c] Heb. viii. 8—12. [d] Jer. iii. 1, 12.

[" Then shalt thou remember thy ways, and be ashamed:" yea, " I will establish with thee my covenant, *that thou mayest* (what? be lifted up with pride? No: that thou mayest) remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Here is the true state of every pardoned soul: the mercy of God towards him humbles him in the dust, and makes him to abhor himself in dust and ashes.

It would be thought by the generality, that the spirit of a loving, faithful and obedient wife would be proper for the spouse of Christ: and so it would if that spouse had never violated her nuptial vows. But we are all like this adulterous woman: and, as an adulteress, who had been precisely circumstanced like her in the chapter before us, would, after being restored to the favour of her husband, never forgive herself, however freely he may have forgiven her, so will a gracious soul when restored to the Divine favour: yea, the very favour of God, in proportion as it is exercised towards him, will only create in the soul a deeper self-abhorrence for ever having sinned against so gracious a God. An admiration of God's goodness, and a lothing of its own vileness, will never cease to occupy the soul that has been thus restored.]

We call you then, in CONCLUSION, to remember,

1. Your covenant mercies—

[How unspeakable are these! The very vilest of the human race may become the spouse of Christ, and be invested with all the honours and privileges of that relation. Will any of you be indifferent towards your God and Saviour, and reject the overtures which he now sends you by me? O remember, that as man and wife are one flesh, so " he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." Let all of you seek to be partakers of this honour. It is by faith in Christ that you become one with him; and by the exercise of the same faith shall all the blessings of the everlasting covenant flow down into your souls — — —]

2. Your covenant engagements—

[You all know what engagements a wife enters into, when she is taking upon her the vows of the marriage-covenant. She is thenceforward to live altogether for him with whom she has contracted this solemn bond. O let every Believer know what he has undertaken, and consider what is to be his constant aim. You must not be contented with some few services; you must be aspiring after such measures of love and purity, as may render you more lovely in the eyes of your blessed

Lord, and may cause his very name to be glorified in you. In the world that is approaching, when the Lamb will publicly take home his Bride, you will be clothed in fine white linen, suited to the occasion. Be preparing those robes, whilst yet you are here; and by the richest unctions of Divine grace be daily becoming meet for the bridal chamber: and then shall the nuptials soon arrive; and you shall be for ever happy in the bosom of your God.]

OUTLINE NO. 1106

PARABLE OF THE TWIG OF A CEDAR PLANTED IN THE HEIGHT OF ISRAEL.

Ezek. xvii. 22—24. *Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know, that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it.*

THE promises of God to his Church are not unfrequently connected with, and, as it were, made to arise out of, his judgments denounced against his enemies. Of this we have a very striking example in the chapter before us, where the very images which are used to represent the guilt and punishment of the king of Judah are employed to prefigure the establishment and increase of the Church of Christ.

To understand the text aright, the preceding context should be considered.

The prophet was commanded to deliver a riddle, or parable, that should set forth the conduct of the Jewish people in a mysterious, but just, light: and then, lest it should not be fully understood, he was to give them the true interpretation of it. Nebuchadnezzar, having taken Jeconiah king of Judah and all his princes captive to Babylon, would not entirely destroy Jerusalem, but made Mattaniah (whom he

named Zedekiah) king in the place of Jeconiah his uncle, and suffered him to enjoy all the rights and honours of royalty, on the express condition of his holding them, not as an independent sovereign, but as tributary to the king of Babylon. All this was quite a gratuitous act; and it lay Zedekiah under the strongest obligations to fulfil towards his benefactor all the engagements that he had entered into, more especially as they were confirmed by a solemn oath. But Zedekiah, unmindful of his oaths, sought the aid of the king of Egypt, that so he might be delivered from what he considered as a disgraceful vassalage, and enjoy a sovereignty independent and uncontrolled. This treachery is represented by God under the image of a twig, cropt off a lofty cedar by a great eagle, and planted by him in a fruitful field, and growing so as to be highly respectable, though inferior in grandeur to the parent stock. This young cedar, dissatisfied with its state, spreads its roots towards another great eagle, (the king of Egypt,) in hopes that through his influence it shall attain a far greater eminence and fertility. But God, whose oath was thereby violated, declared, that the attempt should not prosper, but that, on the contrary, the perjured monarch, who was thus described, should bring ruin, irreparable ruin, on his own head[a]. From hence it might be supposed, that David's throne should never be re-established; but God promises, under precisely the same figure that had been employed to represent these things, that he will restore the kingdom of David, partly under Zerubbabel, but principally under the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ; and that, instead of being ever subverted, like the Jewish polity, or the kingdoms of this world, it shall stand for ever and ever, a glorious monument of his power and truth.

[a] This was preached within about three weeks of Buonaparte being sent to St. Helena. The extraordinary resemblance between his fate and Zedekiah's, as well as of *the grounds and occasions of it*, cannot fail to strike the attentive reader, who compares them together. See ver. 18—21.

We propose to consider this prophecy,

I. As already accomplished—

The Church, though low in its origin, is become exceeding great—

[The Lord Jesus Christ, the Founder of it, was brought into the world when the family of David was reduced to a very low and abject state. He is fitly called "A rod out of the stem of Jesse[b]," that "grew up as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground[c]." During the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he existed in a state of the deepest humiliation: and his Church which he established, consisted only of himself and a few poor fishermen. However, this twig, being planted in the height of Israel, grew, and "brought forth boughs, and bare fruit, and speedily became a goodly cedar." Great and vehement were the storms which menaced its existence; but it withstood them all; and in a little time it spread its branches throughout all the Roman empire. Then "birds of every wing (that is, Jews and Gentiles) came to dwell under its shadow," and to be nourished by its fruits. At this hour its growth is visible from year to year: and in due season it will fill the whole earth, and be the one centre of union, and source of happiness, to all mankind.]

And thus far God is greatly glorified in it—

["Every tree of the field must know" whose work this is, and to whom all the glory of it belongs. Who can survey the Church in its infancy, and not wonder that it was not rooted up as soon as ever it was planted? Every arm was lifted up against it: all the powers of the world combined for its destruction; and not one friend or ally was found for it on the face of the whole earth. The great empires of the world, the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, Roman, all successively fell to ruin, notwithstanding the efforts made for their preservation: but the Church, without any sword but the word of God, or any shield that was visible to human eyes, stood, and stands to this day, deriding all the efforts of men or devils to subvert it. Who then, we would ask, Who is it that has thus "brought down the high tree, and exalted the low? Who is it that has thus dried up the green tree, and made the dry tree to flourish?" Is not all this the work of God? Verily, the burning bush has been a just and lively exhibition of the Church in every age: God was in it, and therefore it was not consumed. In like manner we may speak of every individual branch or twig that grows upon this tree; Who is it that has preserved even the meanest of the saints, in the

[b] Isai. xi. 1. [c] Isai. liii. 2.

midst of all the difficulties and trials he has had to contend with? Must it not be said of all, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God?" Yes, in every tree of righteousness which is the planting of the Lord, God, and God alone, must be glorified[d]. If St. Paul himself was constrained to say, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me," it will scarcely be thought that any one else can arrogate to himself the honour of his own growth, stability, or fruitfulness."]

Gloriously as this prophecy has been already fulfilled, it should be contemplated by us,

II. As yet further to be accomplished—

The Church will doubtless be yet more widely extended through the earth—

[In truth, this cedar has attained at present but a small measure of its destined growth. It is but in a small part of the world that even the name of Christ is known: and, where his religion is professed, there are but few, very few indeed, who experience its renovating power. But it shall not be always thus: the time is coming when "he will multiply them that they shall not be few, and will glorify them that they shall not be small[e]." Then, in a far different sense from what can be affixed to the words at this time, shall it be said, that "fowl of every wing come to dwell under the shadow of this goodly cedar;" for "all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest:" "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him:" "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."]

Then shall God be more abundantly glorified in it—

[The whole Church, and every individual in it, is to God "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." It is in his hands "a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty[f]." But how greatly will his power and goodness appear, when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," yea, and actually enjoy it! If now, when the attainments of his people are so low, he is honoured, how will he be glorified when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days!" And how will he be exalted in that day, when all his saints from the beginning of the world shall be gathered in one bright assembly, and shall join together in one general chorus; how, I say, will he *then* "be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe!" ———]

[d] Isai. lx. 21. and lxi. 3. [e] Jer. xxx. 18, 19. [f] Isai. lxii. 3.

Viewing now the Lord Jesus Christ, or rather his holy religion, as this goodly cedar, let us, in CONCLUSION,

1. Come and rest under his shadow—

[Verily there is no rest for us any where else: we are like "the dove which Noah sent forth from the ark, and which could find no rest for the sole of her foot but in the ark itself." But if we feel our need of a Saviour, if we are sensible that without an interest in him we must for ever perish, then let us attend to his inviting voice, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"———]

2. Give him the glory of all the rest we enjoy—

[Nothing can be more offensive to God than "the sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." This is a provocation which God will not endure: he will not give his glory to another," nor will he suffer "any flesh to glory in his presence." Let us in particular remember, that by the law of faith, that is, by the Gospel, "boasting is, and must for ever be, excluded." For the Saviour that he has given, for the inclination and ability which we have to trust in him, and for all the grace that we have derived from him, we must say, "Not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise." Let us remember, that by covenant and by oath we are bound to trust in him alone: let us not then, like Zedekiah, be bending our roots towards any other, or be looking to any other confidence; but let us seek to please him only whose servants we are, and to glorify him only who hath done so great things for us.]

OUTLINE NO. 1107

EQUITY OF GOD IN HIS JUDGMENTS.

Ezek. xviii. 25—30. *Ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways*

unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

THERE is a general disposition in man to reply against God; and rather to arraign his justice, than to condemn himself. Occasion was taken for this by the Jews of old, even from the declarations of the law and the prophets. The law had said, that God would "visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation;" and the prophets had frequently declared, that the iniquities of Jeroboam, Manasseh, and others, should be visited on their descendants. From hence the Jews profanely characterized the Divine procedure by this proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge[a]." They did not consider, that they themselves were sinners like unto their fathers, and merited for their own iniquities every judgment which God had threatened to lay upon them; nor did they ever consider, that if God was pleased to exercise forbearance towards some, he was not necessitated to continue it towards all, when he saw that the very exercise of it emboldened men the more to sin against him: nor did they ever consider, that the menaces, which were uttered in reference to temporal judgments, were erroneously interpreted, when they were applied to the judgments of the eternal world. The prophet therefore was instructed to expostulate with them on their misinterpretation of God's word; and to declare to them, that though in this world children must unavoidably participate in the judgments of their fathers, it should not be so in the world to come: *there* the son should not bear in any respect the iniquity of the father, nor the father of the son; but "the soul that sinned, it should die." In confirmation of this truth, the prophet argues with them in this chapter, wherein *the whole plan of the Divine proceedings*, in reference to

[a] ver. 2.

the different characters of mankind, is *stated, vindicated,* and *improved.* It is,

I. Stated—

If the righteous man turn away from his righteousness, and die in his sins, he shall perish—

[This is a solemn truth, which men strive by every possible method to evade. When Christian *principles* are insisted on, they will speak of *practice:* but here, when *practice* is spoken of, they will recur to *principles,* and deny that a righteous man *can* so turn away from his righteousness as to perish in his sins. They are like the Samaritan woman, who, when our Lord reproved her for her adulteries, had recourse immediately to controversial matters, and inquired, who were right, the Samaritans, or the Jews, as to the place where Divine worship ought to be performed? Ungodly professors of religion now fly off from what comes home to their own bosoms, and enter on controversy in order to avoid the awful truth that is brought to their ears. But it is a fact, that a righteous man may depart from his righteousness: Demas did[b]: Paul was constrained to use the utmost possible care, lest he should[c]: and all are commanded to take heed to themselves, lest they should do so too[d]. As to God's secret decrees, no man knows what they are, as relating to his own person, or to the person of any individual whatever: nor is there a man in the whole universe that is warranted in saying, *I never can fall; at least, can never so fall as to perish.* David, and Solomon, and Peter, display sufficiently the instability of man; and, if they were restored, their restoration does not shew that they *could not* have perished, but only, that God, for the magnifying of his own grace and mercy, did not leave them to perish. They might have perished, and would have perished, as much as Judas, if they had been left to themselves: it was not any gracious principle which they had in them, and that was in itself indefectible, that recovered them, but God's unbounded grace and mercy, vouchsafed to them according to the good pleasure of his own will.

Hear this then, ye professors of religion, ye who are accounted righteous, and who think yourselves righteous; ye may turn away from your righteousness, and perish. O let this consideration lead you to the utmost vigilance, and stimulate you to the most unremitting exertions in the path of duty!]

On the other hand, if the wicked man turn from his iniquity, and do what is lawful and right, he shall live—

[b] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [c] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[d] 1 Cor. x. 12. Heb. iii. 12, 13.

[Delightful reflection! Hear it, ye sinners of every description: it is the declaration of the Most High God. You must turn indeed from your iniquities, and especially from your besetting sin, mourning over it, fighting against it, bringing it into subjection. You must also be doing all that God requires of you in his blessed word. You must flee to Christ for refuge from the wrath of an avenging God: you must trust altogether in his meritorious death and passion: you must renounce every other hope; and must seek "to be found in Him, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." You must also, in dependence on his Holy Spirit, endeavour to fulfil the whole will of God, and to "walk in every thing as Christ walked." And if indeed ye act thus, we declare, in the name of Almighty God, that "ye shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." As the foregoing characters entertain too little fear, so you are apt to indulge too much; and, because things have been ill, you are ready to suppose they never can be such as to warrant an expectation of the Divine favour. To remove these apprehensions, God *repeats* his gracious assertions respecting you, and declares that you, if you turn to him in the way before specified, "shall surely live; you shall not die." Whatever your sins may have been, they shall all be blotted out as a morning cloud; nor shall so much as one of them ever be remembered against you: though they may have been of a crimson dye, you shall, in the sight of God himself, be white as snow. As the righteousness of the righteous shall never be remembered, when once he departs from it; so neither shall the wickedness of the wicked, when once he turns from it. The present character of every individual is that which shall determine his eternal state.

One would think that such a procedure as this should not stand in any need of vindication: but men, notwithstanding the obvious and undoubted equity of it, will complain of it as unjust.]

In our text however it is,

II. Vindicated—

Inequality indeed there is in abundance on the part of men—

[Every description of sinners is chargeable with injustice towards God. *The profane sinner* accounts it very hard that his sins are to be visited with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. What has he done that deserves such a sentence as this? Why did God give him passions, if he is to be punished to all eternity for the indulgence of them? and, supposing his conduct to be sinful, what proportion do the sins

of a few days or years bear to the everlasting torments of hell? He cannot believe that God will ever be so unmerciful and unjust as to execute on men the threatenings of his word. *The proud formalist* thinks it strange indeed that he is to perish. What! must *he*, who has been so sober, so moral, so regular, so observant of all his duties to God and man, must *he* perish, because he does not adopt the principles, and imitate the practice, of a few wild enthusiasts? No: he hates fanaticism; and will never believe that God requires all that strictness which some enthusiasts speak of; and much less that he will ever banish from his presence those whose whole lives have been so blameless as theirs. *The hypocritical professor*, who can talk of Christ, and exert himself zealously to promote the Gospel, cannot imagine, that *he* should be obnoxious to the Divine displeasure, or that God could be at all just in condemning *him*. True indeed, he does not always adhere to truth, and perhaps is not very strictly just in his dealings: his cares about the world too engross almost all his thoughts; nor has he any pleasure in the duties of the closet: evil dispositions too are unhappily very prevalent in him; pride, anger, envy, hatred, malice, evil-speaking, uncharitableness, retain more or less the ascendant over him; perhaps too intemperance and impurity, if not indulged to such an extent as to expose him to public disgrace, are far from being mortified so as to give way to the habitual exercise of the opposite virtues. But can it be that God should reject *him*, when all his confidence is in Christ, and in the covenant which God has made with us in Christ?

Such are their modes of arguing on the subject of God's final judgment. But we ask, What equity is there in such expectations as these? Is it equitable that a man who lives altogether without God in the world, should be placed on the same footing with one who devotes himself entirely to God? Is it equitable that a man who possesses no more than a form of godliness, should find the same favour with God as one who lives under the continued influence of its power? Is it equitable that a professor of religion who in no respect adorns his holy profession, should be honoured of God like one who is a bright pattern of every virtue, and daily increasing in a conformity to his Lord and Saviour? We ask, Is there any equity in such things? Will any reasonable being venture to say, that such a procedure is becoming a God of holiness and truth?]

But on the part of God there is no such inequality—

[The moral and religious character of men will be the one *ground of all his decisions in the day of judgment*: "According to your ways and according to your doings will he judge you, O house of Israel." "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be

well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: but woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hand shall be given him[e]." This is what in God's name we are authorized and commanded to declare. Respect indeed will be had to the means and opportunities which different persons enjoyed; and on this principle, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for the Jews, who rejected the ministry of our Lord: but still there will be one test to which every man will be brought, namely, How did you improve the privileges you enjoyed, and how did you act up to the principles you professed? No favour will be shewn to any man because he was a Jew, nor will any man be despised because he was a Gentile: "the uncircumcision of the Gentile will be reckoned to him for circumcision, if he keep the law; and the circumcision of the Jew be reckoned for uncircumcision, if he break the law." The conformity of every man to the mind and will of God, as far as he had an opportunity of knowing it, will be the object of inquiry; much or little being required of him in proportion to what has been committed to him: and according as he has neglected or improved his talent, shall be the sentence passed upon him; regard being had, not to the state of a man at any former period of his life, but to his state at the time that he is summoned to the judgment-seat. Now can any man condemn this as unequal or unjust? *Twice* does God appeal even to the very people that presumed to accuse him; and twice does he challenge them to say, on whose part inequality is chargeable, their own, or his?]

The prophet, assuming that after this statement there must be an end of the controversy, shews how these determinations of God should be,

III. Improved—

It is to no purpose that God has declared these truths, if they have not a practical operation on our minds.

The prophet therefore IMPROVES the subject for us, by a word,

1. Of direction; "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions"—

[Repentance is necessary for every child of man: "God commandeth all men every where to repent." But it is not a partial repentance that will suffice: we must "turn from *all* our transgressions: there must be no exceptions, no reserves; no right eye, which we will not pluck out; no right hand,

[e] Isai. iii. 10, 11.

which we will not cut off. *The profane sinner* must abandon all his evil ways, and turn unto God with his whole heart. *The proud formalist* must renounce all his self-dependence, and must live a life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of entire devotedness of heart to God. *The inconsistent professor* also must be brought to a sense of his peculiar guilt and danger; and must become like his blessed Lord and Saviour in all his tempers and dispositions, in all his spirit and deportment towards God and man.

True it is, that these things cannot be done by any power of our own: but this is no reason that we should not address ourselves to the work; nor will it be any excuse for not accomplishing the work, since God has promised to give his Holy Spirit unto all that ask him, and has assured us that his grace shall be sufficient for us. This then is the direction which all must follow; and the foregoing statement clearly shews how important it is that we should follow it earnestly and without delay.]

2. Of encouragement; "So iniquity shall not be your ruin"—

[Iniquity must be our ruin, if we do not thus repent: nothing can save us: God himself, if we may so speak, cannot save us; because he cannot depart from the rules which he has prescribed to himself for his procedure in the last day. However much he may desire to extend mercy to us, he will not do it to the dishonour of his own perfections, and to the destruction of all the established principles of his moral government. No: "except we repent, we must all" inevitably and eternally "perish." But if we thus repent, all will be well: our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall all be put away from us, as far as the east is from the west. Hear the declaration of the Most High God: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon[f]." O let this sink down into our ears: let it encourage us to put away all our hard thoughts of God, and to seek him with our whole hearts. Let us search and try our ways: let us bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's unerring word: let us now so "judge ourselves, that we may not hereafter be judged of the Lord:" and, if a fear arise in our minds that our sins are too great to be forgiven, let this thought comfort us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound; and that, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."]

[f] Isai. lv. 7.

OUTLINE NO. 1108

CONVERSION, IN ITS COMMENCEMENT AND PROGRESS.

Ezek. xx. 37. *I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.*

THE precise import of these words is not clear at first sight. If we take them in connexion with the preceding context, they must be considered as a continuation of the *threatening* denounced against the Jews for their abominable idolatries. Then their meaning will be, 'I will inflict upon you the judgments which your violations of my covenant demand:' or, as God had said by Moses, "I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant[a]." If, on the other hand, the words be taken in connexion with the following context, then they must be regarded as a *promise*, that, notwithstanding the judgments that should be inflicted on them, God had mercies in reserve for them, and would, at a future period, restore them to his favour. And this is the sense to which I rather incline. The obstinately rebellious amongst them, indeed, he would give up to their own lusts, and utterly destroy them[b]: but he would take out a chosen people from among them, and bring them to his holy mountain, and accept all their offerings, and make himself known to them as their reconciled God and Father, and give them repentance to salvation, not to be repented of[c]. This exactly accords with what the prophet had spoken in a preceding chapter: "Thus saith the Lord God: I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth; and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant[d]." In this view the words have a singular beauty; and will lead us to some extremely profitable reflections.

It was customary with shepherds, as it is also at

[a] Lev. xxvi. 25.
[b] ver. 38, 39.
[c] ver. 40—44.
[d] Ezek. xvi. 59, 60.

this day, to make their flocks pass under their pastoral rod, in order that he might number them, or separate some from the rest[e]. In this way God promises to make Israel pass before him, in order to select from them a people unto himself, and to bring them into the bonds of his everlasting covenant. And, in conformity with this view, we might well direct your attention to the future conversion of the Jews, who shall assuredly be restored to the favour of their God. But, waving this part of the subject, I will rather speak of conversion generally; the process of which is the same, whether in them or in us. We may notice, then, this work of conversion, as here described,

I. In its commencement—

"The Lord," we are told, "hath set apart him that is godly for himself[f]." This he accomplishes in a variety of ways:

1. By the dispensations of his Providence—

[Sometimes things which, humanly speaking, we should call accidental, are ordered with a special view to the awakening of immortal souls, and leading them to the knowledge of himself. In our Saviour's progress from Judea to Galilee, "he must needs go through Samaria; and, being wearied with his journey, he stopped at a city called Sichar, and seated himself by a well called Jacob's well. Whilst he was there, a woman of Samaria came thither to draw water." In all this there appears nothing but an ordinary occurrence: but it was God's appointed way of bringing her, together with many others, under the rod, and eventually into the bond of his covenant[g]. Not unfrequently he is pleased to make use of some afflictive dispensation; as in the case of Manasseh, upon whom "God brought the armies of the king of Assyria, who, as his instruments, took him among the thorns, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon:" the effect of all which was, that, "when he was in affliction, this monster of impiety besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers[h]," and obtained mercy at his hands. Multitudes of others also, in every age, have found reason to say, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy law."]

[e] Lev. xxvii. 32. Jer. xxxiii. 13. [f] Ps. iv. 3.
[g] John iv. 3—7, 25, 26. [h] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.

2. By the conversion of some pious friend—

[We see not, in general, any thing remarkable in an accidental interview with a pious person; whilst yet it may, perhaps, have been as particularly ordained of God for a special end, as the meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. God especially directed Philip to join himself to the eunuch's chariot, and to explain to him a passage of Scripture which he was not able to comprehend. By this was the eunuch guided to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and made a partaker of everlasting salvation. Thus, persons sent to us, though they received not their commission in so plain and direct a way, have come to us under the same Divine guidance, and have been made alike successful in their efforts for our good. For similar benefits was Peter indebted to his brother Andrew, and Nathanael to his friend Philip[i]: and perhaps many amongst ourselves must trace our first awakenings to some event of this kind, even to a friendly suggestion from some pious or benevolent instructor.]

3. By the public ministry of the word—

[It is by this, for the most part, that God is pleased to separate, and seal us up, for his own. He sends home his word with power to the heart of one and another, just as he did to the heart of Lydia; and causes them to surrender up themselves to him, as his redeemed people. A whole assembly is present: but a discrimination is made by God, according to his sovereign will and pleasure; who makes "the same word to be to some a savour of life unto life, whilst to others it becomes only a savour of death unto death[k]."]

4. By the secret operation of his Spirit upon the soul—

[We see not the rod in the hand of the great Shepherd; but he is using it every moment, for the purpose of separating a people for himself. By his good Spirit he imparts a sensation to the soul, a heavenly touch, of which the person himself perhaps, at first, is scarcely conscious. By that he enlightens the eyes, and draws the heart; and prepares a person for fuller discoveries of his power and grace. Job says, "God speaketh once, yea, twice; yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man[l]." Doubtless, whatever is done by the Holy Spirit, is, and must ever be, in perfect accordance with the word: but his motions

[i] John i. 40, 45. [k] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [l] Job xxxiii. 14—17.

are not confined to means or instruments of any kind: yet, in his operations, he always deals with us as rational creatures; drawing us, not by force, as inanimated beings, but "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[m]."]

This, then, is the preparatory work, whereby "God causes us to pass under the rod:" and this is the commencement of that conversion, which we are next to mark,

II. In its progress—

God's ultimate view, in these diversified dispensations, is, to bring us into the bond of his covenant, because it is only by virtue of that covenant, and through an interest in it, that sinful man can be saved. When, therefore, he has made us to pass under the rod,

1. He reveals that covenant to us—

[Previous to a work of grace upon our souls, we are altogether ignorant of the covenant which God has made with us, and with his only-begotten Son in our behalf. We have, perhaps, some general notions about repentance and faith; but we have no distinct view of the Saviour undertaking for us to expiate our guilt by the sacrifice of himself, and to work out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death. We see not our need of such a covenant: much less do we so behold its excellency, as to "comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of his love" displayed in it. But, when God, in tender mercy, arrests us in our course, and directs our attention to eternal things, he opens and unfolds to us this covenant, in all its merciful provisions: he shewn us, that in this covenant there is abundant security, both for the honour of God and the happiness of man; inasmuch as, by the provisions of it, all his perfections are glorified, and every want of man is supplied. Thus "his secret is with us, and he shews us his covenant[n]."]

2. He enables us to lay hold on it—

[There is much reluctance in us, at first, to embrace this covenant. It is too humiliating for us; in that it requires us to abandon all self-dependence, and to look for acceptance with God solely through the merits of his dear Son. But when once we have passed under the rod of our divine Shepherd, and been set apart for him, then comes "the day of his power; and we are made willing" to be saved on any terms which it has pleased God to prescribe. The salvation of our

[m] John vi. 44. with Hos. xi. 4. [n] Ps. xxv. 14.

souls is then, in our estimation, "the one thing needful:" and, without any wish to stipulate for ourselves, we cry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Then, as the man-slayer sought a city of refuge, and fled to it with all earnestness from the pursuer of blood, so do we most thankfully lay hold on this covenant, and "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us." In truth, this way of salvation appears precisely such as our necessities require. The covenant makes over to us every thing, as the free gift of God for Christ's sake: and, deeply conscious that we have nothing, and can do nothing, whereby to merit even the smallest of its blessings, we are glad to receive them all "without money and without price."]

3. He confers upon us all the blessings—

["This covenant is ordered in all things, and sure:" it makes over to us all that we can ever need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity. Accordingly, from the time that we are brought to "lay hold upon it," God showers forth his blessings upon us in rich abundance: "he blots out all our iniquities, as a morning cloud;" and pours down upon us the riches of his grace, whereby we are enabled to mortify all our corrupt affections, and to walk before him in newness of heart and life. He makes known himself to us as a Covenant God, that is engaged to fulfil to us all his promises, and to "perfect in us the work he has begun." In short, he gives us to see that heaven itself is our inheritance; and that, whilst "that is reserved for us, we also are kept by his mighty power for it[o]." His faithfulness then becomes no less an object of our affiance than his mercy; and we are enabled, with confidence, to say, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the *righteous* Judge, will give me," at the great day of his appearing.]

We cannot but REMARK from hence,

1. How sovereign God is, in the dispensations of his mercy—

[If a shepherd separate any sheep for his own peculiar use, it is probable that he has some reference to their intrinsic worth, as the ground of his preference. But our heavenly Shepherd has respect to nothing but his own sovereign will and pleasure. This remarkably appears in the passage before us; where the promise of God's mercy is so interwoven with the denunciations of his wrath, as to involve a doubt in which of the two lights it is to be viewed. And in this way it is that God's promises are frequently introduced. By the Prophet

[o] 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

Isaiah, God says of his Church, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth; and yet he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." Now, what might we expect to follow this? What, but some heavy denunciation of his wrath? Yet, behold, he adds, "I have seen his ways, and will *heal* him, and will *restore comfort to him* and to his mourners[p]." It was in this sovereign way that Saul was "made a chosen vessel to the Lord:" and I doubt not but that every individual amongst you, who has ever experienced conversion in his own soul, will trace it altogether to the same source, and say, "By the grace of God I am what I am[q]."]

2. How mysterious are his dealings with the children of men—

[Sheep, when undergoing the process referred to in my text, are usually full of fear and terror, expecting nothing but evil, whilst their shepherd designs them nothing but good. So it is also, most generally, with the children of men, at their first awakening: they apprehend nothing but vengeance at the hands of an offended God; and regard the rod as held over them only for their ruin. But at no distant period their fears are turned into joy: and it is delightful to contemplate what shall soon be the issue of those convictions which perhaps at this time may be filling the souls of some amongst you with terror and dismay. Could you but see what is really passing in reference to you at this moment, you would behold, perhaps, your heavenly Shepherd standing over you, and by his word and Spirit marking you for his own. O, beloved, lift up your hearts to him in earnest prayer, and say, "Take me, Lord, even me, the least and meanest of thy flock!" and learn to regard all his dispensations as means to this blessed end.]

3. How you may best answer all the purposes of his grace—

[You have heard what God's gracious purpose is towards all the objects of his love: he seeks "to bring them into the bond of his covenant." Trouble not then yourselves about the abstruse doctrines of election; but seek to have the ends of electing love accomplished in you. Lay hold on God's covenant; embrace the salvation there offered you; go to the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ; and seek all the blessings of it, in and through him. Then shall you have in yourselves an evidence of that, which you never can discover but by its fruits. It was "from their works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope," that St. Paul knew the election of his Thessalonian converts[r]: and from our laying

[p] Isai. lvii. 17, 18. [q] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [r] 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

hold of God's covenant, we may assuredly ascertain that he has "chosen us to salvation," and loved us with an everlasting love. Again, therefore, I say, perplex not yourselves about what no man can know, except from its effects; but do that which will at once ensure all the blessings of salvation, and demonstrate that God is your God for ever and ever.]

OUTLINE NO. 1109

RESTORATION OF THE JEWS, AND THE CONVERSION OF A SOUL, COMPARED.

Ezek. xx. 40—44. *In mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first-fruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God.*

THE history of the Jews, whether retrospective or prospective, is extremely interesting; not only as abounding in events more wonderful than all the histories of the whole world beside, but particularly as illustrating the dealings of God with the souls of men, at the present day, and in all ages, to the very end of time. Of the retrospective part, such as their bringing out of Egypt, and their sojourning in the wilderness, and their introduction into the promised land, we shall have no occasion to speak at this time: but to the things predicted concerning them, all of which are as certain as if they were already past, and which therefore may be called their prospective history, we would now direct your attention, and especially with

a view to illustrate from them the conversion of our souls to God.

Let me, then, point out,

I. The effect which the restoration of the Jews will hereafter produce on them—

They shall assuredly be restored to God, and to their own land, in due season—

["From all the countries, whither they have been driven, shall they be gathered:" and they shall, in their own land, be restored to the worship, and the favour, of their God — — — The terms in which their services are foretold, correspond with the ordinances which are prescribed by the Mosaic Law — — — But they are intended to express only that spiritual worship, which, under the Christian dispensation, we render unto God. These they will render from their inmost souls; and from God will they receive, as formerly, the most favourable tokens of his acceptance — — —]

The effects produced on them by their restoration will be truly blessed—

[They have been the most stiff-necked of any people; and even at this day are remarkable for the hardness of their hearts: but at that day they will be broken-hearted, and contrite in a very extraordinary degree. The recollection of their having "crucified the Lord of Glory" will pre-eminently lead to this[a]: and *their views of their own extreme baseness will be exceeding deep*[b] — — —

Their knowledge of God, too, will be proportionably enlarged. Their opportunities of knowing God have been hitherto most unprofitably employed: but in that day, when they shall see all the predictions concerning them so wonderfully fulfilled, they will be made to acknowledge, with more genuine feeling than ever, that God's grace has been magnified towards them; and that they themselves are, above all people upon earth, the most wonderful monuments of his grace — — —]

In all this are shadowed forth,

II. The effects which the conversion of our souls will infallibly produce on us—

There is a considerable resemblance between the restoration of the Jews, and the conversion of a soul to God—

[a] Zech. xii. 10.

[b] Compare Ezek. xvi. 63. and xxxvi. 31. with ver. 43.

[From a dark and wicked world is every soul brought in its conversion to God[c] — — — And from that moment it enjoys sweet communion with God, in all the exercises of prayer and praise[d] — — — Then does "God manifest himself unto the soul as he does not unto the world[e]," and communicates unto it all the blessings both of grace and glory[f] — — —]

And in the effects produced on them is there also a very strict resemblance—

[From conversion flows such *a deep humiliation of soul* as was never experienced before. The need of a broken and contrite spirit may have been long acknowledged; but the reality of it is never *felt*, till the soul is brought to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Then the wonders of redeeming love are seen; and all the evils of the heart and life are felt as heightened and aggravated by the consideration of them: so that the soul actually lothes and abhors itself as a very mass of iniquity[g] — — —

From it also is derived such a knowledge of God as the soul never before had any conception of. The perfections of God may have all been acknowledged before, in a speculative way; but now the soul realizes them, and feels itself a living witness and monument of them all — — — Especially does it then see the sovereignty of God, as exercised in the communications of his grace to men. Once, perhaps, the idea of God's sovereignty was painful to the mind: but now it comes with a power and sweetness that cannot be described. The believer needs not now be told that he has not been dealt with according to his deserts: he knows full well where he should have been, if God had not been exceeding abundant in mercy towards him: and from his inmost soul he gives all the glory of his salvation to God alone — — — The one subject of thanksgiving amongst the heavenly hosts is the continued subject of his song on earth[h] — — —]

Let me, then, URGE YOU all to seek this conversion:

1. It is that by which God is to be glorified on earth—

[To the Jews, God says, "I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." They, when converted to God, will be most distinguished monuments of God's power and grace; yea, and of his truth and faithfulness also. And such, brethren, are ye to be, at this time: ye are to be "as lights shining in a dark world." And such should be the change visible in you,

[c] John xv. 19. and xvii. 14. [d] 1 John i. 3. [e] John xiv. 22.
[f] 1 John v. 14, 15. [g] Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.
[h] Rev. i. 5, 6.

as persons turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that all who behold you may "glorify God in you." Especially let them see, that the mercies vouchsafed to you, so far from puffing you up with pride, are the means of humbling you in the dust before God, and of filling you with the most self-denying love to man ——— Ye are to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men[i]:" and so is your light to shine before men, that all who behold you may glorify your Father who is in heaven[k]."]

2. It is that by which alone your souls can be saved—

[There must be in you a separation from the world, from worldly maxims, worldly habits, and worldly company. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world; and is utterly to be renounced; since, if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you[l]." To God, also, must you be brought: so as to "walk before him," and to seek all your happiness in communion with him. You must also, to your latest hour, be abased before him in dust and ashes; and maintain upon your souls such a sense of his excellency, as must be to you a very foretaste of heaven itself. True, indeed, all this is not learned at once: but, as a child, at its first coming into the world, possesses all the parts of a man, so must all these things be begun in you, if ever you would approve yourselves as children of the living God ——— O, seek of God that grace that shall be sufficient for you; and know, that, as his future mercies to the Jews will not be obstructed by their past obduracy, so neither shall the descent of his grace on you be prevented by any unworthiness of yours, if only you will cry to God in his Son's name, and "flee to Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before you." "Of those who come to God in the name of Christ, not one shall ever be cast out."]

[i] 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. [k] Matt. v. 16. [l] 1 John ii. 15, 16.

OUTLINE NO. 1110

MEN'S TREATMENT OF THE GOSPEL.

Ezek. xx. 49. *Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?*

THE word of God, by whomsoever spoken, should be received with reverence and godly fear. Great care indeed should be taken to examine whether the

word which is spoken in his name be agreeable to the sacred oracles; but when that point is ascertained, then we should bow before it, and submit ourselves wholly and cheerfully to its directions. This is the plain dictate of reason and common sense: but yet it is far from being the regulating principle of men's actions; for at the very time that men acknowledge the divine authority of the word delivered, they set themselves in a variety of ways to invalidate its force, and to withstand its influence. The Jews who came to inquire of Ezekiel had no doubt of his being a prophet, inspired of God to declare unto them his holy will. Yet when he did deliver to them the messages sent by his divine Master, they poured contempt upon them, and said, "Doth he not speak parables?"

From hence we shall take occasion to shew,

I. How the messages of God are treated—

The import of the observation made by the Jews on Ezekiel's ministrations seems to have been, that his word was altogether so figurative and unintelligible as to be unworthy of any serious attention. It may be thought perhaps that this was a singular case; but it is, in fact, a just specimen of the way in which the messages of God have been treated from the beginning of the world—

[When Noah preached to the antediluvian world, he was regarded as a weak alarmist, who merited only their pity and their scorn. When Lot warned his family of the impending judgments that would soon fall on Sodom and Gomorrha, "he seemed," we are told, "as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." When Jehu was informed by a prophet that God had destined him to assume the royal authority, the messenger was designated by the title, *that mad fellow;* "What said that mad fellow unto thee?" If we come to the New-Testament dispensation, we find our blessed Lord himself, who "spake as never man spake," treated in the same contemptuous manner: *many* of the Jews said of him, "He hath a devil, and is mad: why hear ye him[a]?" and again, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil[b]?" The name, "that deceiver," seems to have been given him by his enemies as a common

[a] John x. 20. [b] John viii. 48.

appellation[c]. His Apostles met with precisely the same reception. St. Paul was accounted a babbler; and when speaking most unquestionably "the words of truth and soberness," was thus reviled; "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad[d]." And is it not thus at the present day? Is not every one who delivers the word of God with fidelity and boldness represented as a fanatic, and a deceiver? Some condemn the *matter* of his discourses, as visionary, as erroneous, as unnecessarily strict, or as lax even to licentiousness. Others condemn the *manner:* if it be firm, it is harsh; if affectionate, it is canting; if written, it is dull; if unwritten, it is enthusiastic, and devoid of sense. In a word, it is now as in the days of old: when John came, neither eating nor drinking, it was said he had a devil; and when our Lord came with condescending freedom, "eating and drinking," it was said of him, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners:" and in like manner we, "whether we pipe or mourn," are equally unacceptable to our hearers, and obnoxious to their censure[e].

It is worthy of observation too, that the opposers of the Gospel seem never to entertain a doubt but that they are quite correct in all the censures which they pass upon those who minister the word unto them. "Doth he not speak parables?" was in the apprehension of Ezekiel's hearers an obvious fact; and the inference which they drew from it, namely, That he was unworthy to be regarded, was in their estimate perfectly legitimate and undeniable. So now the folly of all who preach the Gospel, and the consequent propriety of disregarding every thing they say, are considered as so plain, that none but persons equally weak with themselves can entertain a doubt upon the subject.]

If such be indeed the treatment generally given to the Lord's messages, it will be useful to inquire,

II. Whence it is they are so treated—

Doubtless persons who mean well may both speak and act with considerable indiscretion, and may by their injudicious conduct cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. But as the treatment of God's messages is the same by whomsoever they are delivered, we must look for the reason of it, not so much in the messengers, as in those to whom they are sent. There are then in the hearers of the Gospel many obstacles to a just reception of it;

[c] Matt. xxvii. 63. [d] Acts xvii. 18. and xxvi. 24.
[e] Matt. xi. 16—19.

1. A pride of understanding—

[Men think themselves qualified to sit in judgment upon the word of God, just as much as upon any human composition; and, when it accords not with their pre-conceived opinions, they do not hesitate to pronounce it foolishness[f]. To receive it with the docility of little children they would consider as a degradation to them. They account it not indeed a degradation to children to receive instruction from their parents, or their authorized instructors; but they see not any such distance between the mind of God and theirs, as to call for any such submission to him on their part, though "they are born like a wild ass's colt." Hence it must necessarily arise that they will stumble, and be offended, at the great mysteries of redemption.]

2. An independent spirit—

["Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" is the reply, which, not Pharaoh only, but the whole host of rebels, make to the commands of God. It is awful to observe how little weight the authority of God has in influencing the conduct of the world. Tell them how much their interest will be affected by this or that line of conduct, and they will give a patient attention to your advice: but speak of God's judgments, and they will "puff at them" with sovereign contempt[g]. Such treatment they themselves would not endure, for a moment, from a child or servant of their own: but they offer it to God without any self-reproach, or any fear of his displeasure. They will not indeed confess that they thus oppose themselves to their Maker: they will maintain, that the word spoken to them is no just expression of his will: but this is a mere cover to their rebellion: they will not comply with his commands, and therefore they will deny altogether that they proceed from him, or else will so interpret them as altogether to change their import, and evade their force.]

3. An inveterate aversion to holiness—

[To a formal and external righteousness many are not at all averse; they rather love it, as a substitute for spiritual obedience. But bring to their view the requisitions of God's law, and they cry out against them, as unreasonably severe, yea, as utterly impracticable and absurd. Our Lord himself informs us, that this is the true source of their rejection of his word: "They love darkness rather than light: they even hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." No wonder that they cry, "Doth he not speak

[f] 1 Cor. i. 18, 23. and ii. 14. [g] Ps. x. 5.

parables?" when they are determined beforehand not to understand the plainest declarations.]

Before any determine thus to reject the messages of Heaven, it will be well for them to consider,

III. What consequences must ensue from this treatment of them—

Certainly,

1. All the ends of our ministry among them must be defeated—

[It is in vain to speak to those who will not hear: the invitations, the promises, the threatenings of Scripture can be of no avail to those who will not acknowledge the authority of God in them. What a melancholy reflection is this, that God should send ambassadors to men with messages of peace and love, and that men should "make light of them," and recompense with hatred and contempt every effort that is made for their salvation. Well might Paul "have continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart," when he reflected on the state of such persons, and that, instead of having to present them to God as his joy and crown, he should have to appear as a swift witness against them in the day of judgment.]

2. Their guilt and condemnation must be greatly aggravated—

[No man leaves the house of God as he came into it: the ordinance which he has attended has either brought him nearer to heaven, or prepared him more as fuel for the fire of hell. If the word be not "a savour of life unto life, it is a savour of death unto death." Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that "if he had never come and spoken unto them, they would comparatively have had no sin:" but that in consequence of their rejection of his proffered mercies, "the state of Sodom and Gomorrha would be more tolerable in the day of judgment than theirs." In like manner we must say to our hearers, that every opportunity of instruction which they have enjoyed is a talent to be accounted for; and that their hiding of it in a napkin will be a ground of their condemnation[h].]

APPLICATION—

[And now what account must we carry to our God concerning you? He has sent us to deliver his messages; and he will require of us some account of the manner in which they have been received amongst you. And what shall we say? Must we not, in reference to the greater part of you, say,

[h] John iii. 19.

"Ah! Lord God," we come with a painful report: we would have rejoiced to have told thee, that thy word had had "a free course, and been glorified amongst them;" but we are constrained to declare, that, if not in word, yet at least in spirit, they say of us, "Doth he not speak parables?" Some do really think that the message we deliver is no other than "a cunningly-devised fable;" whilst others, acquiescing in it as coming from thee, are too busy, or too careless, to pay any respect to it. Some, it is true, take a pleasure in hearing thy word, just as Ezekiel's hearers did; but, like them, they will not comply with any one of thy commands: their cares, their pleasures, their desire of earthly things, carry them away, and entirely engross their minds: they are hearers of thy word, but not doers of it: and though they sometimes are made to see their face as in a glass, they go away, and presently forget what manner of men they are. Thus, though they differ from one another in many things, they agree in this, namely, to refuse subjection to thy blessed word, and to follow the imaginations of their own hearts.

This however is not the case with all: there are some who receive the word, "not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." Some there are that say of us, We have been messengers of glad tidings to their souls, and instruments in thy hands for their eternal welfare. The Saviour whom we have announced to them is precious to their souls; they look to him; they trust in him; they rejoice and glory in his salvation; and they shew forth their faith by their works. "O Lord God, what thanks can we render unto thee for all the joy wherewith we joy before thee on their account!" truly "they are our glory and joy." O blessed Lord, increase their number a hundred fold; and "establish all their hearts unblameable in holiness unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!" that when we shall be summoned to thy judgment-seat to give up our account to thee, we may do it with joy and not with grief. Let not one of them turn back again to perdition; but keep them all steadfast in faith and love and holiness, that we may have the joy of presenting them perfect before thee in that day, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!"]

OUTLINE NO. 1111

OFFICE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 8. *When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die! if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand.*

THE office of a minister is the most important and most difficult of any that we can be called to sustain. It is the most important, because the salvation of multitudes depends upon it: and it is the most difficult, because it requires such self-denying habits, and spiritual affections. The responsibility also that attaches to it is such, that no man would dare to take it upon himself, if he had not a promise of peculiar assistance in the discharge of it. Ministers are the messengers of God to men: to them they must faithfully declare his whole counsel: however painful the truths may be which they are to deliver, and however averse men may be to hear them, they must execute their commission at the peril of their souls. To this effect God speaks in the words before us: in which we may notice,

I. What God saith to the wicked—

It is scarcely possible to conceive a more solemn declaration than that before us; "I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die!" Consider,

1. Who are the people addressed—

[These are all who do not unfeignedly turn from sin to God. It matters not whether they be rich or poor, old or young, learned or unlearned. In some sense, it matters not whether their sins have been more or less heinous: for though there certainly are degrees of guilt, and some are more wicked than others, yet all are wicked, who are not following after God in righteousness and true holiness; and consequently, all such persons, however their characters may vary in other respects, are addressed in the text.]

2. The declaration of God unto them—

[Death is here denounced as the judgment to be inflicted on all who turn not to their God: and to the same effect the inspired writers uniformly speak[a]. Nor are we at a loss to determine what is meant by "death:" it is the wrath of God[b], the misery of hell[c]. This is the judgment that will come upon every individual who shall be found in the state before described. God may be considered as addressing himself to every individual of the human race: "O *thou* wicked man!" Nor is

[a] Isai. iii. 11. Rom. vi. 23. Jam. i. 14, 15.
[b] Rom. i. 18. [c] Rev. xxi. 8.

this fatal result of wickedness expressed in doubtful terms: there is no peradventure; the decree is fixed; "Thou shalt *surely* die!" Who can reflect on these words as proceeding from a God of infinite power and of inviolable truth, and not tremble?]

3. The condition implied in that declaration—

[If there were no condition implied in the declaration, it would have been to no purpose to make known the declaration itself; since it could have no other effect than to torment men before their time. But as in the message to Nineveh, "that in forty days Nineveh should be overthrown," there was an implied condition, that, if they repented, the threatened vengeance should be withheld; so, in this case, there is an implied assurance, that the wicked, if they will repent, shall not die. And this is expressly stated in the following context[d]: so that, awful as this passage is, it is no less encouraging than it is awful; because it assures the contrite and believing sinner that he shall never perish.]

Together with this warning, we see in the text,

II. The necessity imposed on ministers to proclaim it—

Ministers are described as watchmen, or sentinels, placed at a distance from the camp to give notice of the enemy's approach. Now this very character marks both their duty and their responsibility. But the consequences of neglect in any minister are declared in two respects:

1. The person whom he neglects to warn, will perish—

[If through the sloth or treachery of the sentinels a camp be surprised at midnight, nothing but confusion and ruin can ensue. Thus, if a person appointed to warn the wicked, neglect to do so, the wicked will continue regardless of their impending doom, till it is too late to avert it. And when the hour of vengeance is come, it will be to no purpose to say, "I was not aware of my danger; my minister has betrayed me." No; the wicked have means of information within their own reach, independent of their ministers; and they have secret intimations in their own consciences that they ought to repent: and therefore they must take the consequences of their own wickedness; "they must die in their iniquity." How awful is

[d] ver. 14—16.

this effect of one minister's supineness! Alas! that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, should perish eternally, when, if he had warned them faithfully, they might have been saved for ever!]

2. He himself also will be dealt with as the author of that sinner's destruction—

[As a sentinel who, by neglecting to give notice of the enemy's approach, occasioned the overthrow of the army to which he belonged, would be chargeable with all the consequences of his neglect, so will the blood of all that perish through the minister's neglect "be required at his hand." When they shall all stand before God, he will ask of the minister, Why didst thou not warn that man, and him, and him, and him? It will be to no purpose to say, "Lord, he was rich, and I was afraid of his displeasure;" or, "Lord, he was poor, and I overlooked him;" or, "Lord, I was so engaged in business or pleasure, that I never thought about the souls committed to my charge." No: he must answer for every soul that perishes through his means, and must sink ten-fold deeper into the bottomless abyss than the most guilty of the people whom he has neglected and betrayed.]

APPLICATION—

[After stating these reasons for ministerial fidelity, we need make no apology for "warning the wicked from their way:" or rather, we need apologize for not using far greater plainness of speech that we have ever yet done.

Hear then, ye wicked, with solemn awe, the voice of God to you. "O thou wicked *drunkard*, thou shalt surely die!" "O thou wicked *whoremonger*, thou shalt surely die!" "O thou wicked *swearer*, or *sabbath-breaker*, thou shalt surely die!" Is there any one here that, though free from gross sins, *lives in a neglect of secret prayer;* "O thou wicked man, *thou* shalt surely die[e]!" — — —

But while we declare these things, we would not be unmindful of the compassion which is expressed in the very mode in which God has denounced his judgments; "O thou wicked man!" This seems to intimate, that God is grieved for the misery of the wicked, even while he declares the doom that awaits them. So would we be; and the rather, because we ourselves are involved in the same condemnation, if we do not repent and turn to God.

O then, brethren, whether ye have committed gross sins or not, remember that ye all need to humble yourselves before God as condemned sinners: ye all need to wash in the

[e] This may be easily extended to the *formalist*, the *hypocritical professor*, &c.

fountain of the Redeemer's blood: ye all need to "turn from your transgressions, that so iniquity may not be your ruin." O that God may enable you to accept this warning with all thankfulness! We have striven, as it became us, to "deliver our own souls:" the Lord grant that, in thus endeavouring to "save ourselves, we may be instrumental to save also those that hear us[f]!"]

[f] 1 Tim. iv. 16.

OUTLINE NO. 1112

GOD EXPOSTULATING WITH SINNERS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

THE excuses which men offer for not turning unto God, are, for the most part, reflections cast on the Deity himself. One man deems the service of God unnecessary; another thinks it impracticable in his particular situation; another says, I can do nothing without grace, and if God do not bestow his grace upon me, how can I help myself? Such was the disposition manifested by the Jews of old, when they were invited and commanded to repent: they complained, that it was to no purpose to repent, since they were already pining away under their transgressions; and that the promises of life, which were held forth to them in God's name, were delusive, since God, so far from wishing to pardon them, had shewn a pleasure in executing his vengeance upon them[a]. Against such unrighteous accusations, God vindicates himself by an oath, and by the most pressing and affectionate exhortation renews his calls to repentance. In the message which he sent by the prophet to the Jews, we have his message to sinners of every age and nation: and in delivering it to you at this time we would call your attention to two things contained in it:

[a] This seems to be implied in ver. 10. as connected with the text.

I. A solemn oath—

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord speaketh," yea, sweareth; and, "because he can swear by no greater, he swears by himself," even by his own life and immortal perfections. But what is it which Jehovah condescends to confirm in this solemn manner?

1. That he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner—

[What? was this a matter so doubtful, that it was necessary to remove our doubts in such a way? Methinks, we need no further proof of this than our own continuance in the land of the living. Should we, should any of us, have been here, if God had taken pleasure in our death? Have we not provoked God in ten thousand instances to cut us off, and would he not long since have consigned us over to perdition, if he had not been slow to anger, and rich in mercy? — — — Would God moreover have given his only dear Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to convert and sanctify us, yea, would he wait so long to be gracious unto us, and, notwithstanding our obstinacy, follow us every day with invitations, entreaties, promises, and expostulations; would he act thus, I say, if he had pleasure in our death? — — —Surely it was not any uncertainty respecting this truth itself, but our backwardness to believe it, that gave occasion for such an astonishing vindication of it.]

2. That he has pleasure in the conversion and salvation of sinners—

[This is not at all less obvious than the foregoing truth: and the same observations which confirm the one, will establish the other also. But we may farther refer both to existing facts, and most explicit declarations, in support of this assertion. We cannot conceive more atrocious guilt than that which David had contracted, guilt aggravated a hundred-fold by his past professions and experience. But no sooner did he acknowledge his transgression, than the prophet who had been commissioned to denounce the heaviest judgments against him, was inspired to reply, The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die[b]. In what beautiful colours is the mercy of our God painted in the parable of the lost sheep, and the returning prodigal! Is it possible for words more fully to describe how much "he delighteth in mercy?" Let us marvel then at the condescension of our God in confirming such declarations

[b] 2 Sam. xii. 13.

by an oath. Had he "sworn in his wrath that we should not enter into his rest," we might easily have accounted for it; because, however merited such a judgment might be, he is never brought, but with extreme reluctance, to execute it.[c] But to establish his character for mercy in such a way, was altogether superfluous, except for the more abundant display of his own goodness, and the richer consolation of our minds.]

That this testimony of God, respecting his own delight in mercy, may not fail of producing its proper effect on our minds, it is enforced by,

II. An affectionate exhortation—

Had we not already seen such condescension as almost exceeds our belief, we might well be filled with wonder at the further proofs of it which are exhibited in the text—

The Creator and Judge of all stoops to use the language of entreaty towards perishing sinners—

[He does not simply issue his command, but repeats it with all the tenderness and solicitude of the most affectionate parent. He sees with deep concern how "all like sheep are gone astray, every one to *his own* way:" one is wandering in the paths of open sensuality and profaneness; another has involved himself in the labyrinths of worldly care; another is pleasing himself with the idea that he belongs to the fold of God, while he has nothing but "the form of godliness without any of its power." But God would have all return to him, to walk in *his* ways, and to enjoy his blessings. He longs to see the sensualist, the worldling, and the formal professor of religion, all truly and thoroughly awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, and all seeking after the salvation of their souls as the one thing needful. He would not that one of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live. Hence his earnestness in urging their immediate and effectual return.]

He further enforces his request with a most animated expostulation—

[Sin and death are inseparably connected: there is no alternative but to flee from sin or perish for ever; we must *turn or die*. This is evidently implied in the expostulation which God uses; and the certainty of it is far more strongly marked, than if it had been asserted in the plainest terms. Let sinners then answer the question which God puts to them,

[c] Isai. xxviii. 21. "His *strange* act."

"Why *will* ye die?" Is death, eternal death so light a matter, that ye will subject yourselves to it for the fleeting gratifications of sin? Is it a light thing "to fall into the hands of the living God," and to have "both body and soul cast into hell" for ever? Or is a life of godliness so painful, that the labours of it will not be repaid by all the felicity of heaven? If we were to ask you, Why will ye seek after God? Why will ye regard your souls? Why will ye forsake the beaten paths of sin, and walk in the unfrequented ways of righteousness? your answers would be plain; the most ignorant might give such a reply, as not all the wisdom of man could gainsay or resist. But what will ye answer to the interrogation in the text? And if you are constrained now, notwithstanding your habits of self-vindication, to acknowledge the folly and madness of your conduct, how much more will you be speechless in the day of judgment, when the enormity of such conduct will appear without any palliation or disguise! Let not God then reason with you in vain: but turn from those ways, which you are not able to justify, or, with any shadow of propriety, to excuse.]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who are now at length desirous of returning to God—

[It is not from profaneness to morality, or from morality to an outward observance of religious duties, that God calls us; but from all sin whatever to a sound and thorough conversion. Be sure then that you do not mistake in a matter of such infinite importance; but turn to God in the ways which he has appointed. Go with penitence and contrition to the Lord Jesus, that you may be washed in the fountain of his blood: and pray to God for the influences of his Spirit, that you may be "sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit, and be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." Rest in nothing short of this, for it is to this only that the promise of life is annexed; "you must be converted, and become as little children (simple, teachable, dependent, obedient in all things) if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven."]

2. To those who are still determined to withstand the entreaties of God—

[Go on in sin, till you have filled up the measure of your iniquities: but remember, ye will not have to cast the blame on God in that day when your calamities shall come upon you. God has at this very hour testified with an oath, that it is his desire to save your souls; yea, he at this moment expostulates with you, and beseeches you to seek his face. Nor shall ye have to accuse your minister in that day. We are

told indeed, in the very chapter before us, that the blood of those who perish, shall be required at the hands of negligent and unfaithful ministers[d]: but, even though your blood were to be required at the hands of your minister, it would be no alleviation of your misery, since you also would die in your iniquity, and be condemned together with him. We hope, however, and are determined, God helping us, to be "pure from your blood:" we have warned you, and do warn you yet again, that you must *turn or die;* "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Whatever others therefore may plead, *ye* have, and shall have, none but yourselves to blame: and it will be a bitter reflection in the day of judgment, to think, that "God called, and ye refused;" and that "Christ would often have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not." May God prevent those reflections by giving you repentance unto life, for his dear Son's sake: Amen, and Amen.]

[d] ver. 7—9.

OUTLINE NO. 1113

THE SELF-DECEPTION OF COVETOUS PROFESSORS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. *And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*

NONE can be religious without appearing so; because religion must of necessity regulate our outward conduct. But persons may appear religious, while they are wholly destitute of vital godliness. Such were they, who talked *of*[a] the prophet in their houses, and expressed so much solicitude to hear from him the word of the Lord—

We propose to consider,

I. The characters here described—

[a] "So the word "*against*" should be read in ver. 30. as the whole context evidently shews; and it is so rendered in the margin of the Bibles.

[If we look at their *profession* only, all is well: they unite themselves to the Lord's people, and account themselves to be of their number. They pay great attention to the ordinances; they feel peculiar delight in the ministration of the word; they express a very high regard for those who labour in the word and doctrine; they are not offended even with the most searching discourses; nor are the sons and daughters of pleasure more gratified with musical entertainments, than they are with the fluent, fervent, eloquent harangues of a faithful minister.

But, alas! their *practice* ill accords with their profession: it is amusement rather than real edification that they seek. Their hearts are set upon the world, and riveted to their earthly possessions. In the pursuit of gain they will be guilty of falsehood or dishonesty; they will commend their goods, when they know them to be bad; they will impose on the ignorance or the necessities of those who deal with them; they will take advantage of the confidence reposed in them to overreach their neighbour; and will condescend to meannesses, of which an honest heathen would be ashamed. They may be generous where their own inclination is strongly concerned, or where a liberal donation will advance their reputation; but at other times they will be as penurious and niggardly as the most unfeeling miser. It may be indeed that a principle of honour keeps them tolerably observant of truth and justice; but they give abundant evidence that their hearts are set upon things below rather than on things above, and shew, that they are more solicitous to be rich in this world, than to be rich towards God — — —

Such there have been in every age; nor are there wanting many such characters among the professors of the present day[b]. They hear the duties of a Christian opened and enforced; but they remain as much under the dominion of their lusts as ever — — —]

II. The light in which they are viewed by God—

[*In their own eyes* they are as good as any. Whatever be their besetting sin, they have reasons enough to extenuate and excuse it. Their covetousness is nothing more than prudence and diligence; their fretfulness and fiery passions are the mere infirmities of nature, the trifling ebullitions of a warm and hasty temper, that are far more than counterbalanced by a proportionable zeal for what is good. When they hear the contrary dispositions recommended from the pulpit, they

[b] The characters of a proud and passionate professor, and of a censorious and uncharitable professor, might here be drawn, as being equally common, and equally hateful.

acknowledge the directions to be exceeding proper; but they scarcely ever feel their own conduct condemned by them. They are eagle-eyed in spying out the faults of others; but they are almost utter strangers to their own. Their zeal for the Gospel, and their attachment to those who preach or profess it, is to them a decisive evidence of their own conversion; and nothing that God or man can say to the contrary is suffered for one moment to shake their confidence.

In the estimation of the Church these persons often pass for eminent saints. Their faults are not generally known, and the best construction is put upon all they say or do. Godly men are afraid of judging harshly, and have learned to exercise the "love that hopeth all things," and that "covereth a multitude of sins." Hence they give the right hand of fellowship to those who shew a love to the Gospel; and, even when they fear that all is not right, they are content to "let the tares grow up with the wheat till the harvest, lest through their ignorance they should pluck up the wheat with the tares."

But *in the sight of God*, who searcheth the heart, these men appear in their proper colours. Are they covetous? "he abhors them[c]." Are they proud, passionate, contentious? they are actuated by an infernal spirit[d]. Have they no government of their tongue? their religion is vain[e]. Are they hearers of the word, and not doers of it also? they only deceive their own souls[f]. Are they habitually and allowedly under the dominion of any sin whatever? they are children of the devil[g], and not of God[h]: notwithstanding all their profession, they have no part in the Gospel salvation[i], no acceptance in their prayers[k], nor any portion but eternal misery in hell[l]. They may have a name to live; but they are really dead before God[m].]

INFER—

1. How far must they be from a Christian state, who feel no delight in divine ordinances!

[It has already appeared that men may be extremely fond of the offices, the ministers, and the professors of religion, and yet perish for ever for want of that conformity to the Divine will, which is essential to the Christian character. How much more then must they be destitute of religion, who have not even the outward appearance of sanctity, but live in an open contempt of God's word and ordinances! Let not

[c] Ps. x. 3. [d] Jam. iii. 14, 15. [e] Jam. i. 26.
[f] Jam. i. 22. [g] 1 John iii. 8. [h] 1 John iii. 9.
[i] 1 John iii. 6. and Rom. vi. 14. [k] Ps. lxvi. 18.
[l] Mark ix. 43—48. [m] Rev. iii. 1.

any one imagine that the naming the name of Christ is sufficient to constitute us Christians. The tree must be judged of by its fruits: and according to our works will be the sentence that shall be upon us in the last day.]

2. What need have the professors of religion to examine well their own hearts!

[Love to the word and people of God, if accompanied with an unreserved obedience to his commandments, is an excellent evidence of our conversion: but, if there be a reigning inconsistency in our conduct, our love to the one or to the other of these is mere hypocrisy[n]. Let us then inquire diligently, and beg of God to try us, whether there be any wickedness practised in our lives, or harboured in our bosoms[o]? Let us not be content to "honour God with our lips, while our hearts are far from him." Let us rather entreat him to "put truth in our inward parts," that, while we profess to be interested in the promises, we may "purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God[p]."]

[n] Matt. xv. 7, 8. Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. Isai. lviii. 2, 3.
[o] Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. [p] 1 Cor. vii. 1.

OUTLINE NO. 1114

CHRIST'S EXECUTION OF HIS PASTORAL OFFICE.

Ezek. xxxiv. 16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

THERE is no office under heaven so important as that of ministering unto men the Gospel of Christ. But, alas! its importance is but too little felt, and its duties are too negligently performed[a]. There is, however, one Shepherd, whose care and vigilance are without intermission. He it is, who, many hundred years before he came into the world, spake by the prophet, and declared the manner in which he would execute his office[b].

In the words before us we see,

[a] See ver. 2—10. [b] ver. 23.

I. The different states of Christ's sheep—

[All are considered as the sheep of Christ, who by name and profession belong to him, as well "the fat and the strong, who shall be destroyed," as those who shall be saved[c].

All without exception, while in their natural state, are "lost," straying from God, and ignorant of the way in which alone they can return to his fold[d]. Some feel an inclination to enjoy his benefits, and at times resolve that they will turn from their evil ways: but they are "driven away" by the violence of their passions or the fear of man.

Of those that have been brought home to the fold, many, like David, are complaining of griefs and sorrows, more painful than a "broken" bone[e]. And all are "sick" of sin, that lothesome malady which pervades all their powers both of body and soul, and incapacitates them for serving God as they would wish to do[f].

There are too many, alas! who are "fat and strong," in their own conceit[g]. Were they really in good condition, they should not be "destroyed." But, like the Laodiceans of old[h], they deceive themselves; being really destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength, in exact proportion as they fancy themselves possessed of these things.]

II. The correspondent dealings of Christ with them—

[Though in many instances our Lord displays his sovereignty in stopping the progress of most grievous sinners, while he suffers persons of more amiable deportment to wander further from him[i], yet all are to expect that he will deal with them in a perfect correspondence with their character.

He came from heaven in human flesh, and still comes in the preaching of his Gospel, to "seek" and save "that which was lost." And if any, who have been "driven away" by the force of temptation or persecution, are desirous to put themselves under his care, he will gladly bring them to his fold, and protect them from every inward or outward foe[k].

As for those who are already in his fold, he will administer to all their wants, "binding up" the broken-hearted[l], and "renewing the strength" of those who are ready to faint[m]. By the efficacy of his word, and the consolations of his Spirit, he will turn their sorrows into joy[n]: and his grace shall be

[c] John x. 16. [d] Isai. liii. 6. [e] Ps. li. 8.
[f] Rom. vii. 18, 19, 21, 23, 24. Gal. v. 17.
[g] It is in this sense that our Lord speaks of "the whole," and "the righteous." Matt. ix. 12, 13.
[h] Rev. iii. 17. [i] Acts ix. 1—6. Mark x. 21, 22.
[k] ver. 11—15. with John x. 10, 11, 28. [l] Isai. lxi. 1, 3.
[m] Isai. xl. 29—31. [n] Isai. xxxv. 1, 2, 10

sufficient for them under all the trials they may be called to endure[o].

Willing as he is to pardon the very chief of sinners on their repentance, he will awfully punish the impenitent. The proud and self-sufficient, who despise his offers of mercy, shall surely feel his awful displeasure. He will "destroy" them as enemies both to himself and his flock: and, in order to their destruction, he will "feed them with judgment," giving them up to follow their own delusions, till they shall have completed the measure of their iniquities, and fattened themselves for the sword of his indignation[p]. Yes; to eternity shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways[q], and feel the judgments which they would not deprecate[r].]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us put ourselves under the care of this good Shepherd—

[The more we consider our state the more shall we see, that we are straying, or, at best, diseased sheep. But here is our comfort, that we have a tender and faithful Shepherd that will forgive our wanderings, and supply our wants[s]. Let us then return to him, if we are afar off[t]; or, if he have brought us to his fold, let us rely upon his care and faithfulness[u].]

2. Let us imitate him to the utmost of our power—

[Doubtless it is in the first place the duty of *ministers* to follow the steps of this great Shepherd, because his flock is more immediately committed to their care[x]. But it is also the duty of every one in his place and station to exert himself to the utmost to enlarge and edify the flock of Christ. And, if we were more diligent in our respective spheres, how many might be reduced from their wanderings, or strengthened in their difficulties, or comforted in their troubles! We know not how useful a word in season might prove. "Let us then, as the elect of God, put on bowels of mercies," and shew our relation to Christ by our conformity to his image.]

[o] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [p] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. [q] Prov. i. 31.
[r] Isai. l. 10, 11. [s] Isai. xl. 11. [t] 1 Pet. ii. 25.
[u] Ps. xxiii. 1—3.

[x] If this were the subject of a *Visitation* or *Ordination* Sermon, this thought should be prosecuted at some length, in reference to the whole preceding part of the chapter.

OUTLINE NO. 1115

DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. *I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.*

THERE is nothing so comforting to an afflicted soul, as to contemplate the promises of God: indeed they were given to us for this very purpose, that they might be our support and consolation in the time of trouble. The same may be observed with respect to the prophecies that relate to Christ; they were delivered to the Church in seasons of peculiar trial, as encouragements to the saints to hold fast their profession. It was under circumstances of this nature, that the glorious prophecy before us was revealed. Both the *ecclesiastical and civil governors* of Israel had greatly oppressed the poor, and especially the godly: but God afforded them seasonable support, by declaring, that he would not only espouse their cause, but would raise up to them *a Shepherd*, and *a Governor* of a very different description, even the Messiah himself, who should redress all their wrongs, and bring them into the possession of perfect happiness.

Such being the occasion of the words, we proceed to consider them,

I. As fulfilled at the first coming of our Lord—

It is undoubtedly the Messiah that is here called "David"—

[David himself had been dead many hundred years; nor has there been any other person after him, to whom this appellation was ever given. But Christ is frequently spoken of in the prophets by the name of David[a]; and to him the characters, here annexed to that name, most eminently belong. He is called by that name, because David was a very distinguished type of him. David was chosen by God from a very low state, and was anointed to be king over Israel. He was also made a prophet of the Most High God; and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, often spake as actually personating

[a] Jer. xxx. 9. Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 25.

the Messiah himself. Many parts of his heavenly compositions, though *apparently* intended respecting himself, have indeed no reference to himself at all, except as he was a type of Christ, in whom the very things predicted were *literally* fulfilled[b]. And so exact was the correspondence between the type and antitype, that Christ, springing "from the root of Jesse," "as a root out of the dry ground[c]," and "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows[d]," was born (according to the predictions) in the very place of David's nativity[e], was constituted a prophet like unto him, and was raised to "the throne of his father David[f]."]

He sustains the offices that are here assigned him—

[Like his honoured representative, he was to be a shepherd. David, in his early youth, followed the occupation of a shepherd, and repeatedly exposed his life to most imminent danger in defence of the flock entrusted to him[g]. And, after he became a king, he still figuratively at least sustained the same office, "feeding his people, according to the integrity of his heart, and guiding them by the skilfulness of his hands[h]." But he, whom David typified, was in a far more exalted sense, "the great Shepherd of the sheep[i]." He not only exposed, but willingly sacrificed, his life for his sheep[k]: nor can a juster description of him be conveyed in words, than that which is given us in the preceding context[l]: He is incessantly "seeking the lost, bringing back that which has been driven away, binding up the broken, strengthening the sick," and administering to the necessities of all. He is also, like David, a prince. The promises of David's exaltation were at last fulfilled, and he was seated on the throne, to which he had been appointed. He did indeed meet with innumerable conflicts in his way to it: at one time, we see him encountering Goliath; at another, fleeing from the murderous attacks of Saul: yea, he was even driven from his kingdom by his own nearest relative, and treasonably sacrificed by his most familiar friend; in consequence of which, he fled weeping over that very brook Kidron, over which his Lord passed afterwards to crucifixion. But God preserved him from every danger, and made him "Head over Israel," and "the heathen" too[m]. Thus it was also that Christ was raised to his throne: He had scarcely made his appearance in the world before he became an object of Herod's jealousy,

[b] Ps. xxii. 18. and lxix. 21.
[c] Isai. xi. 1. and liii. 2.
[d] Ps. xlv. 7.
[e] Mic. v. 2. with Matt. ii. 5, 6.
[f] Luke i. 32.
[g] 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35.
[h] Ps. lxxviii. 70—72.
[i] Heb. xiii. 20.
[k] John x. 11.
[l] Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.
[m] Ps. xviii. 43.

and was forced to seek an asylum in a heathen land[n]. On many occasions he escaped only by a miraculous exertion of his own almighty power[o]. When his time was come, he was betrayed by one of his own disciples, who, like David's treacherous friend, speedily went and hanged himself[p]. But, infinitely beyond David, was Christ "a man of sorrows;" "his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Yet, after all, "the stone which the builders refused, was made the head-stone of the corner." He was "exalted to be a *Prince* and a Saviour[q]," "the utmost ends of the earth were given him for his dominion;" and "of his kingdom there shall be no end[r]."]

For his people also he secures the blessings that are here accorded to them—

["God is made their God:" and this comprehends all that men or angels can receive. It is not possible for a finite imagination to conceive the full import of such an expression as this. It must certainly imply, that he will protect us from all kinds of evil, and fill us with the richest consolation both in this world, and the world to come: every perfection, which God himself possesses, shall be improved for our present benefit, and all his glory shall be enjoyed for our eternal happiness. Yet shall this most assuredly be our portion, if we be numbered among the flock of Christ. To such indeed it is that the promise in the text must be confined. As for the ungodly world, they have no prospect whatever of such a blessing: there is not one word in all the holy oracles, that warrants such a hope. But to those who believe in Christ the promises are made: to those, who have been brought into his fold, who feed in his pastures, and yield up themselves unfeignedly to his dominion, God has pledged himself to be their God. Nor shall any who seek him in his appointed way, fail to be partakers of it[s].]

But we must view this prophecy,

II. As waiting for a fuller and more glorious accomplishment—

We cannot doubt but it shall be yet more abundantly fulfilled—

[Its completion in the apostolic age was very partial. The Jews themselves yet look for its accomplishment in their

[n] Matt. ii. 14, 15. [o] Luke iv. 29, 30.

[p] Ps. lxix. 25. and cix. 8. with Acts i. 20. shew Ahithophel to be in this a type of Judas.

[q] Acts iv. 11. and v. 31. [r] Ps. ii. 8. Luke i. 33.

[s] Ezek. xxxvii. 24—28.

Messiah. *Nor is the time far distant* when it shall be fulfilled in all its glorious extent[t] — — — The Lord Jesus will gather his people from every quarter of the globe[u] — — — He will feed them in green pastures, and rule over them in Zion[x] — — — And God will manifest himself to be "their God," with such displays of his glory, as shall far transcend any which he ever vouchsafed to his people in the days of old[y] — — —]

ADDRESS—

Receive now the Saviour under the characters in which he is here offered to you—

[Could we obtain mercy with God in any other way, there were the less reason for concerning ourselves about an interest in Christ. But in vain shall we attempt to ingratiate ourselves in the divine favour by any other means: we must obey the voice of that good *Shepherd*, and follow him: we must submit ourselves to the government of that *Prince*, and become his faithful subjects: then, and then only, will God acknowledge us as his people, and give himself to us as our God. Let us not then neglect the Saviour any more: let us rather go to him with one accord: let us entreat him to take us under his charge. Then, whatever may be the fate of those who are at a distance from him, we shall be delivered from our spiritual enemies; and, having suffered awhile with him, shall in due time be glorified together[z]. You may safely trust the promises of God.

Many hundred years before the coming of Christ was this prophecy delivered: and how exactly was it accomplished in every thing that respected *Him!* He was appointed our Shepherd; he was exalted to be our Prince; and to this very hour has he executed these offices in their fullest extent. Shall we doubt then whether the prophecy shall be fulfilled as it respects *us?* Will God refuse to be our God, when we desire to be his people? Or will he be only *nominally* our God, and withhold from us the blessings that are implied in that relation? Has he done what is so infinitely greater, and will he decline to do the less? Has he not "delivered up for us his only Son, and will he not with him also freely give us all things[a]?" We cannot doubt. He says, "*I the Lord have spoken it:*" we may be certain, therefore, that he will perform; since "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let us trust then, and not be afraid; and in due season we shall enjoy, "according to his covenant, the sure mercies of David[b]."]

[t] Isai. xxix. 17. [u] Hos. iii. 5. Jer. xxxii. 37—41.
[x] Isai. xxiv. 23. [y] Isai. lx. 19, 20.
[z] Rom. viii. 17. [a] Rom. viii. 32. [b] Isai. lv. 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1116

CHRIST THE PLANT OF RENOWN.

Ezek. xxxiv. 29. *I will raise up for them a plant of renown.*

THE names by which our blessed Lord is designated in the Scriptures are exceeding various. Every one of them illustrates some part of his character, and leads us, as it were, one step towards the knowledge of him; though, as the light of all the stars combined would give but a very faint idea of the sun, so the lustre reflected from every image in the creation conveys a very inadequate notion of the beauty, the excellency, the fulness of Christ.

That the image in the text refers to him, is clear from the whole context. God, having severely reproved the negligence of those whom he had appointed to watch over his flock[a], promises that he will raise them up a Shepherd, who shall faithfully discharge all his duties, and execute for their good the trust reposed in him[b]. This, without any further explanation, would have been sufficient to point out to us "that good Shepherd," the Lord Jesus Christ: but the subsequent verses mark the name and offices of this Shepherd in such plain terms, that there is not a possibility of doubt respecting the person to whom the prophecy immediately and exclusively relates[c]. In the text, the same person is spoken of, only under a different metaphor: in considering which we shall notice,

I. The representation that is here given of Christ—

Christ is often spoken of by the prophets under the figure of a branch[d], or rod, growing out of a stem[e]: and in this view he is represented as contemptible in the eyes of a blind and ungodly world[f]. But he is deservedly called, "A plant of renown,"

1. On account of his mysterious nature—

[a] ver. 2—10. [b] ver. 11—16. [c] ver. 23, 24.
[d] Jer. xxxiii. 15. Zech. vi. 12, 13. [e] Isai. xi. 1.
[f] Isai. liii. 2.

[Never did such a plant as this exist before. Never could the highest archangel have conceived it possible that such a plant should exist, unless God had expressly revealed it to him. Nothing in the whole creation has any resemblance to it, or could convey the smallest idea of it. This plant has two perfectly distinct natures, and each of those natures complete in all its attributes: it is both divine and human: it unites in itself the fulness of the Godhead with all the sinless infirmities of manhood. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is "God manifest in the flesh:" and a most stupendous mystery it is[g]! The manner also in which he assumed our nature was most mysterious. He was not born like other men, but formed in the womb of a pure virgin through the intervention and agency of the Holy Ghost. And in this view, "as a child born, and a son given," it was expressly declared that "his name should be called, Wonderful[h]."]

2. On account of his transcendent qualities—

[Other trees have one species of fruit, and are useful chiefly, if not entirely, in one view only. But behold, this plant bears twelve manner of fruits; fruit for every season, whether of prosperity or adversity; fruit for every occasion that can possibly arise; and suited to every person who desires to partake of it[i]. Moreover, the leaves of this tree are as salubrious as its fruit; and are an infallible remedy for all the maladies to which our souls are exposed. Its virtues have been proved in every age. Its fame has been spread throughout the whole universe: and the more it has been tried, the more, without one single exception, has it been valued. The tree cast into the waters of Marah, was but a faint shadow of this, which, if properly used, would heal the fountains of iniquity that diffuse their deadly poison through the whole world[k]. This branch is of yet further use to build the temple of the Lord[l]: well then might the prophet say of it, that it should be "excellent and glorious[m]."]

3. On account of the estimation in which he is held—

[See in what light he is viewed by his heavenly Father: "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth[n]!" See what the angels think of him: no sooner did they see him planted in the earth, than they came down from heaven to announce the glad tidings, and ascribed "Glory to God in the highest[o]." Shall I need to

[g] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [h] Isai. ix. 6. [i] Rev. xxii. 2.
[k] Exod. xv. 23—25. [l] Zech. vi. 12, 13. [m] Isai. iv. 2.
[n] Isai. xlii. 1. Prov. viii. 30. Matt. iii. 17. [o] Luke ii. 7—14.

tell you how he is regarded by man?" By those who know him not, "he is despised and rejected:" but "to them that know him, he is precious[p]." What joy was excited in Abraham's heart, when he only got a glimpse of him, two thousand years before his incarnation[q]! With what ecstatic fervour did the prophets call upon the whole creation to rejoice in the prospect of his advent[r]! When he was come, and his excellencies were more fully known, his disciples "counted all things but dung for the knowledge of him[s]," and were ready, at all times, and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him[t]. There are multitudes also in the present day, in whose eyes he is "chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely[u]." But how will they express their admiration of him in the day when "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe[x]!" In heaven too, when all that have eaten of his fruits, and felt the healing efficacy of his leaves, shall surround that "tree of life," and unite in ascribing to it their whole salvation; what "a plant of renown" will it *then* appear!]

As God has fulfilled to us this gracious promise, and raised up for us this plant of renown, let us consider,

II. Our duty towards him—

In allusion to the metaphor, of which we ought not to lose sight, it may be observed, that we should,

1. Abide under his shadow—

[Many are the storms and tempests to which we are exposed, and from which nothing but this tree can shelter us. It is planted on purpose that it may be "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[y]." If we flee to him, we are as safe as the Israelites were in their blood-sprinkled houses, from the sword of the destroying angel[z]. When "God shall rain down fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest on the wicked[a]," we shall have no cause for fear; for "though a thousand shall fall on our side, and ten thousand at our right hand[b]," "no evil whatsoever shall befall us;" "he will cover us with his foliage; and his truth shall be our shield and buckler." Let us then draw nigh to him; and we shall experience the blessedness of

[p] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [q] John viii. 56. [r] Isai. xliv. 23.
[s] Phil. iii. 8. [t] Acts xx. 24. [u] Cant. v. 10, 16.
[x] 2 Thess. i. 10. [y] Isai. xxxii. 2. [z] Exod. xii. 21—23
[a] Ps. xi. 6. [b] Ps. xci. 1, 4, 7, 10.

the Church of old, who "sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto her taste[c]."]

2. Live upon his fruits—

[We have before observed, that every kind of fruit is to be found in him: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, peace, and whatever else we can desire, are to be obtained from him in rich abundance[d]. And every one may get access to him. We need not go up to heaven, or down to hell, or travel to a remote country: he is nigh to us: he is in the Church; he is in our closet; he is in our very hearts[e]: wherever we go, there he is, ever present with us, ever ready to supply our wants. No fiery sword prohibits our approach to him[f]: on the contrary, he invites us to come to him, to cease from "feeding upon ashes," and to take of his fruits freely[g]. None are shut out from this right. There is no wall about him, no exclusive privilege to those who by national, or even personal, relation may be considered as nigh to him: but "all who are afar off," whether they be old or young, rich or poor, moral or immoral, are invited to partake of all his benefits[h]. Moreover, there is no price required, as there is for the fruits of other trees: we are told to "eat abundantly[i]," and to take it all "without money and without price[k]."

Let us then accept this gracious invitation, and "eat, and live for ever[l]."]

3. Bless God for him—

[What a mercy would the fallen angels account it, if such a plant were to be raised up for them! And how thankful would they be, who are now out of the reach of this tree, if they might return to this world for a single hour with a permission to gather its fruits! Surely then we who have liberty of access to it, and especially those of us who are daily eating its fruits, should bless and adore our God for "his unspeakable gift[m]." If, only on the eve of its being planted in this world, the pious Elizabeth, the blessed Virgin, and the divinely inspired Zacharias brake forth into such exalted strains of praise and thanksgiving[n], surely we should not be silent, but should call upon "our souls, and all that is within us, to bless his holy name[o]."]

4. Commend him to others—

[The lepers who found abundance in the Syrian camp,

[c] Cant. ii. 3. [d] Ezek. xxxiv. 30. [e] Rom. x. 6—8.
[f] Gen. iii. 24. [g] Isai. lv. 2.
[h] Acts ii. 39. with Rom. x. 12, 13. [i] Cant. v. 1.
[k] Isai. lv. 1. [l] Isai. lv. 3. [m] 2 Cor. ix. 15.
[n] Luke i. 68, 69. [o] Ps. ciii. 1.

could not forbear going to acquaint their famished countrymen with the good tidings[p]: and shall we be backward to inform our neighbours respecting this tree, whereby all their diseases may be healed, and all their wants supplied? The moment that Andrew and Philip had discovered it, they endeavoured to bring their friends to a participation of their bliss[q]. Let us do the same. Our enjoyment of its fruits will be enhanced, rather than diminished, by a communication of them to others. Let us, I say, in compliance with the direction given us, exert ourselves to the uttermost, if peradventure we may introduce them to the knowledge of Christ, and be instrumental to the salvation of their souls[r].]

[p] 2 Kings vii. 9. [q] John i. 40, 41, 43, 45. [r] Isai. xii. 4—6.

OUTLINE NO. 1117

OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT ON THE JEWS.

Ezek. xxxvi. 24—28. *I will take you from among the Heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

IT will appear strange to say to a Christian assembly, that the true nature of Christianity is but little understood: but it is even so: for almost all persons regard it only as a code of laws, or a system of restraints: whereas, in truth, it is a mine of promises, of "exceeding great and precious promises," which are made to every one who feels his need of them, and desires to embrace them. I say not that it does not also contain precepts; for no doubt it enjoins a total surrender of ourselves to God: but there is not any thing which it requires, which it does not also make over to us as a free gift of God for Christ's sake. Take, for example, the passage before us. It is

delivered to the Jews in their present dispersed state: and it provides for them all the blessings which they stand in need of, both in this world and in the world to come.

Let us consider these promises,

I. As delivered more immediately to the Jewish people—

Whatever reference these promises might have to the period of their return from Babylon, it is manifest that they did not receive at that time a full accomplishment; and, consequently, that we must look forward to the future restoration of the Jews as the period fixed for their final completion.

The Jews are destined to be restored to their own land—

[Of this, I conceive, there can be no reasonable doubt. The prophets speak so fully and so plainly on this subject, that we must divest language of all force and certainty before we can set aside the hope of their restoration to their own land. Whether that event shall precede or follow their conversion, I presume not to determine.

It should seem, from the writings of Moses, that the conversion of some, at least, will precede their return to Palestine: "When thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and obey his voice, THEN the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity[a]." The Prophet Jeremiah, on the other hand, represents both events as simultaneous: "They shall come with weeping; and with supplications will I lead them[b]." But in the passage before us, the prophet speaks of their conversion as subsequent to their restoration: "I will bring you into your own land: THEN will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." All of these testimonies doubtless are true; and they are easily reconciled, by only referring them to the different stages of their conversion, as viewed in its commencement, its progress, and its consummation. But, whatever be determined with respect to this, their future restoration to the land of their fathers is as certain as any event which yet remains to be fulfilled.]

It is, however, not to this, but to the conversion of their souls, that I would chiefly draw your attention—

[a] Deut. xxx. 1—3. [b] Jer. xxxi. 8, 9.

[This is indisputably promised to them in the words of my text. And it is surprising how universally this view of the passage has been overlooked by the Christian world. There are few passages of Holy Scripture that are more frequently cited by the preachers of the everlasting Gospel than this: but, as though we were determined to rob the Jews of their interest in them, we have always omitted the first and last verses of the text, and applied the remainder altogether to ourselves: thus cutting off, as it were, the head and the feet, which marked the promise as belonging to the Jews, that we might seize upon the body as our own exclusive property. It is surprising that benevolence, which certainly is characteristic of the Christian world, should never have led us to contemplate and delight in the prospects here set forth for the comfort of God's ancient people. But we have been as unmindful of their spiritual interests as if no such promise had been ever made to them, yea, and as if no such people existed in the world. And this is the more remarkable, because the same connexion between their conversion to God and their restoration to their own land is generally marked in the prophetic writings, and especially in places where these peculiar promises are made to them[c]. But it is certain that God will bestow upon them all the blessings which are here specified; sanctifying them wholly to himself, and making them, as in the days of old, his own peculiar people. The gift of God's Holy Spirit was declared, upon the day of Pentecost, to be reserved, not for the Jews of that day only, but "for them, and for their children, and for all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord their God should call[d]."

In the promise which is made to them in my text, there is an especial reference to the consecration of the Levites under the Mosaic Law. They were separated from all the other tribes, to wait upon God in the more immediate services of his sanctuary: and for this purpose they were consecrated to the Lord with peculiar solemnity: "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And *thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them:* sprinkle water of purifying upon them . . . . . Then let them take a young bullock with his meat-offering . . . . . and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin-offering . . . . . and the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering, unto the Lord, to make an atonement for the Levites[e]." Thus will God take that whole people for priests and for Levites[f]" in the latter day, and sanctify them wholly

[c] See Ezek. xi. 17—20. and Jer. xxxii. 37—39.
[d] Acts ii. 39.
[e] Numb. viii. 6—8, 12.
[f] Isai. lxvi. 21.

to himself as his peculiar people. He will, by the atoning blood of Christ, and by the influence of his Holy Spirit, cleanse them from all their filthiness, and from all their idols: he will altogether renew them, also, in the spirit of their minds, and cause them to walk as holily as any of their most eminent ancestors in the days of old. In the presence of the whole world shall they be thus exalted: and whereas their name is now "Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi," as disowned, and cast off from God; they shall again be recognised as "Ammi, and Ruhamah;" that is, as his people who have obtained mercy at his hands; and "God will say unto them, Thou art my people, and I am your God[g]." Would you see them in the very act of returning, and behold their reception with their reconciled God, the Prophet Jeremiah, in a fore-cited passage, exhibits them before you, "coming to their God with weeping and with supplications;" and God, with paternal tenderness, declaring to them, "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born[h]."

The Jews, it is true, think but little of these prospects; (they, alas! are occupied rather with expectations of a temporal Messiah, under whom they shall attain the summit of worldly aggrandizement:) but it becomes us to look forward to far higher things in their behalf, and to anticipate with delight their actual enjoyment of them.]

Whilst we rejoice in the prospects held forth in this prophecy to the Jewish people, let us consider it also,

II. As applicable to the Church of God in all ages—

The promises here given are those of the new covenant[i]; and all who lay hold on that covenant, whether Jews or Gentiles, and whether now or in the millennial age, are alike interested in them. From the time that the Holy Spirit was sent forth by our ascended Saviour, have these blessings been poured out, in the richest abundance, on God's Church and people; and, to every contrite and believing soul, God here promises his Holy Spirit,

1. To cleanse from sin—

[To cleanse from the *guilt* of sin is, in the first instance, the office of *Christ*, by the sprinkling of *his blood*. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit also; because it is he who reveals

[g] Hos. i. 6—8. and ii. 1, 23. [h] Jer. xxxi. 8, 9.
[i] Heb. viii. 8—10.

Christ to the soul, and enables us to apply to ourselves his precious blood. And, in fact, it is by implanting in our hearts the principle of faith, that he renews and sanctifies us after the Divine image: "He purifies our hearts by faith[k]." To what an extent we need his gracious influences, it is scarcely in the power of language to declare. Both "the flesh and the spirit of man" are altogether polluted and corrupt; as the Psalmist expresses it, "Our inward parts are very wickedness[l]." Were all the thoughts and workings of our hearts as visible to men as they are to God, who is there amongst us that would not often be constrained to hide his face with shame and confusion? The idols, too, which we set up in the secret recesses of our hearts, alas! how numerous they are, and how fearfully have they provoked the Most High God to jealousy! But "from all our filthiness, and from all our idols, shall we be cleansed," through the operation of the Spirit of God upon our souls; according as it is said by the Apostle, "Christ has loved the Church, and given himself for it; that he might sanctify and *cleanse it with the washing of water* by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish[m]." O! hear this, all ye who are weary and heavy laden with the guilt and burthen of your sins; and know assuredly, that if this is promised to the Jews in the Millennial age, it is no less promised to the Christian Church, and shall be fulfilled to all who will believe in Christ.]

2. To renew the heart—

[Verily, in every unregenerate man is "an heart of stone." Who does not feel this? Who has ever addressed himself to the work of repentance, and not found how insensible his heart is of sorrow or of shame, even on a review of a whole life of sin? With earthly concerns we are easily moved; but not with the concerns of the soul, even though we know that the wrath of Almighty God is revealed against us, and that we are justly obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. But God promises to "take away from us the heart of stone, and to give us an heart of flesh," tender, contrite, abased before God in dust and ashes. Shall the Jews, on their restoration, "look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born[n]?" Shall they, in the day to which my text refers, "remember their own evil ways, and their doings which were not good, and lothe themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and

[k] Acts xv. 9. [l] Ps. v. 9.
[m] Eph. v. 25—27. [n] Zech. xii. 10.

abominations[o]?" And shall not such be the effects wrought on our souls, if the Spirit of God be truly poured forth upon us? Our hearts shall be altogether renewed; so that we shall be, as it were, "a new creation:" "old things shall pass away, and all things become new." Our dark *understanding* shall be enlightened; our rebellious *will* be subdued; our earthly and sensual *affections* be "purified, even as God is pure." Together with our views, our desires shall be renovated; and all our hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, be brought into an accordance with them. In a word, we shall "be renewed, after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness." O! what a blessed change! Who will not from this hour seek to be a partaker of it, through the abounding mercy of our promise-keeping God?]

3. To sanctify the life—

[What has been before spoken metaphorically, is here delivered in plain terms: "God will put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes, and do them." Adverse as we are by nature to God, and ready to complain of "his commandments as grievous," we shall be made to "delight in his law after our inward man," as soon as he has put his Holy Spirit within us: for "his law will then be written on the fleshy tables of our hearts." There will be a constraining influence of our souls, which shall overcome all our natural reluctance, and make us the willing servants of our God. To state precisely *how* this work shall be wrought in us, is beyond our power: but methinks there is some analogy between the first creation of all things and this new creation which takes place in the soul of man. As an impulse was given to all the heavenly bodies, which are kept in their respective orbits by the attractive influence of the sun, around which they move, and whose radiance they reflect; so is there a divine impulse given to the soul of the regenerate man, who, from the first commencement of his course, yields to the attractions of "the Sun of Righteousness," and fulfils his destined offices, to the praise and glory of his God. It is by his circuit only that the laws by which he acts are discovered; and they are known to proceed from God, because they lead him invariably to God: the effects produced upon his heart and life are decisive evidences that God is with him of a truth: they shew, that "He who hath wrought him to this self-same thing is God, who hath given unto him of his Spirit[p]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Lay hold on these promises yourselves—

[o] ver. 31. [p] 2 Cor. v. 5.

[You see how freely, and with what sovereign grace, God makes these promises unto you: for, if they are made to the Jews under their present state of degradation and wickedness, there is no one so debased or sinful, but that he may well appropriate them to himself, and seek an interest in them. You will take especial notice, that here are no conditions imposed in order to obtain an interest in them: nothing is required, but that we seek for these blessings in humble and fervent prayer[q]. As to the blessings themselves, every part proceeds from the unmerited love and mercy of God: in every clause, God's will is pointed out as the one source of all the benefits. And when God is thus saying, "I will," "I will," "I will," do these things for you, shall there be any reluctance shewn on our part? Shall it be said of us, as of the Jews of old, "How often *would I* have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *ye would not?*" O, brethren, let me rather entreat you, in reference to every clause, to add your hearty "Amen," "So be it unto me, O Lord, according to thy will." And I the rather urge this; because, without an experience of the things here promised, no soul from amongst you can ever behold the face of God in peace. Say, I pray you, can you "be the Lord's people, and Jehovah be your God," whilst these things are disregarded by you? Can you ever be exalted to thrones of glory, if you be not first cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ from all your filthiness, and from all your idols? Must not your heart of stone be changed, and your ungodly life be rectified, before you can enjoy the felicity of heaven? Your own consciences will attest, that this change is necessary: and therefore let all of you, whatever your present character may be, lay hold on these promises, as the one ground of your hopes, and as the only means of securing the blessedness to which they lead.]

2. Endeavour to promote the acceptance of them among the Jews—

[It is a shame and a scandal to the Christian world, that they have shewn such indifference to the welfare of the Jews for so many centuries. And surely it is high time that we awake at last to some sense of our duty. Remember, I pray you, what is the object which you are called to effect: it is not the restoration of the Jews to their own land: *that* you may well leave to the providence of God to accomplish in his own time and way: it is rather the conversion of their souls to God which calls for your aid; and I appeal to you, whether *that* do not deserve your most active co-operation. You may

[q] ver. 37.

say, perhaps, *That* is God's work, and may also be left to him. But it was not thus that the Apostles judged, in reference to us Gentiles. They could not, by any power of their own, convert a single soul: but did they *therefore* decline to use the means which God himself had appointed? No: they preached Christ to all to whom they could gain access: and it was in confirmation of their word that the Spirit of God descended on their hearers. St. Peter, when speaking to Cornelius and his company, said, "To Christ give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." And then it is particularly said, "*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them* that heard the word[r]." Thus, in concurrence with your efforts, God in his mercy will return to his deserted people; and again "take them as his people, and be their God." Surely, the very hope of this is sufficient to animate you in your exertions: and if only in a few instances you may be instrumental in effecting this blessed end, it will richly repay you for all the liberality that you can exercise, and all the labour you can bestow.]

[r] Acts x. 43, 44.

OUTLINE NO. 1118

THE DUTY OF SELF-LOTHING.

Ezek. xxxvi. 31. *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.*

IT should seem, that the more excellent any man became, the higher thoughts he would have of his own excellence: and the more he was conformed to the will of God, the more he would be filled with self-complacency. But the very reverse of this is the truth. Men's humiliation will always increase in proportion as they know the extent of their duty, and are made sensible of their defects; and consequently, the more they advance in holiness, the more they will lament their past, and remaining, iniquities. The words of our text confirm this. They are addressed, not to persons living in wilful and deliberate sin, but to persons "cleansed from their filthiness," and possessed of "a new spirit, whereby they are

enabled to walk in God's statutes:" even to them is the injunction given, to "lothe themselves for their abominations."

We shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

Repentance, though an universally acknowledged duty, is but little understood. It implies,

1. A calling of our evil ways to remembrance—

[However tenacious our memory may be of evils committed by others against us, we are very forgetful of the evils which we ourselves commit against God. But we should go back to the earliest periods of our life, and review the transactions which then took place: we should then prosecute our inquiries through each successive year, till our reason was expanded, and our judgment informed with respect to the nature and consequences of sin: we should advance in this way through the different stages of our existence, till we arrive at the present time. Much evil will doubtless have passed away, and left no trace behind: but much may be recalled to our minds, sufficient to shew, that the whole bias of our souls has been towards wickedness, and that, in proportion as our faculties of body and mind have been enlarged, we have devoted them to the service of sin and Satan.

Having brought our examination down to the present time, we should enter more deeply into the qualities even of our best actions: we should search into *the motives* from which they sprang; *the manner* in which they were performed; and *the end* at which we aimed in the performance of them: we should do this, *not with a view to find our good deeds, but "our doings that were not good:" not to furnish ourselves with grounds of self-approbation and self-complacency, but rather of humiliation and contrition.*]

2. A lothing of ourselves on account of them—

[The calling of our ways to remembrance is only preparatory to that more essential part of true penitence, "the lothing of ourselves on account of them." To this it must lead: if it stop short of this, it is of no avail. It is in vain that we are alarmed and terrified with a sense of our guilt; for Pharaoh[a], and Judas[b], confessed their sins under a sudden impression of fear and remorse: nor will it suffice to express a considerable degree of sorrow on account of our state; for even in Ahab's humiliation this was found[c]: we must be brought to self-lothing and self-abhorrence.

[a] Exod. x. 16, 17. [b] Matt. xxvii. 3—5. [c] 1 Kings xxi. 27.

The Scriptures illustrate sin by "a dog returning to his own vomit," "and a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire[d]." It must be confessed that the former of these metaphors is most disgusting: but the more disgusting it is, the more suited is it to the occasion; since the conduct of the sinner, like that of the dog, argues an unspeakably filthy and depraved appetite. Let us apply this metaphor, not to gross sins only, but to sin in general; and then consider, that sin has been, not merely a morsel swallowed under some violent temptation, but our daily food, yea, the only thing towards which he had any real appetite: and what filthy creatures shall we then appear! What disgusting objects must we be in the sight of God; and how ought we to lothe and abhor ourselves! The latter metaphor also is a just representation of our conduct; and shews, that no terms are too degrading, no images too disgusting, to represent the filthiness of our habits, and the depravity of our hearts.

Nor let it be thought that this representation is too strong; for it accords, not only with the text, which is frequently repeated[e], but with the confessions of the most eminent saints[f], and justifies fully that declaration of Job, "Behold, I am vile! I repent, therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes[g]."]

That this is the duty of all, without exception, will appear by considering,

II. When it is to be performed—

We must not limit this repentance to the time of conversion merely; we must, as the context shews us[h], continue it after our conversion: indeed the period subsequent to our conversion is that wherein this duty is more particularly required. For,

1. Conversion qualifies us for it—

[Till we are converted, we see but very few of our sins; because we have very defective views of the law of God. Being ignorant of the demands of the law, we must of necessity be ignorant of the multitude of our transgressions against it. Moreover we see but little of the malignity of sin; because we are unacquainted with the immense obligations which we owe to God, against whom our sins are committed. An act of unkindness in a fellow-creature, though trifling in itself, may be an exceedingly heinous offence, if done in return for many and great favours. What then must sin be, when committed against

[d] 2 Pet. ii. 22.
[e] Ezek. vi. 9. and xx. 43.
[f] Gen. xviii. 27. Isai. vi. 5.
[g] Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.
[h] "*Then*." See ver. 25—27.

God, who has not only loaded us with temporal blessings, but has given his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to instruct us; yea, and has followed us all our days with intreaties, expostulations, promises, seeking nothing so much as our eternal welfare! This is the view of sin which conversion gives us; and it is this alone which can ever dispose and induce us to lothe ourselves.]

2. We need it as much after conversion as before—

[A converted person will certainly not indulge sin: but he still carries about him a sinful nature, that is bent to backslide from God, and that still operates to the wounding of his conscience, and the offending of his Maker. Now every sin committed in this state is incomparably more heinous than it would have been in his unrenewed state, because it is committed against more light and knowledge, more mercies and obligations, more vows and professions. Even smaller sins involve him now in deeper guilt than his more heinous trespasses before; and therefore they demand a suitable humiliation and contrition. Hence then it is evident, that, while we carry about with us a body of sin and death, we ought incessantly to lothe ourselves, and to be crying with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me[i]?" Indeed this is the very frame to which God's pardoning mercy is designed to bring us. And the more we abase ourselves before him, the more evidence we have of our acceptance with him[k].]

INFER—

1. How opposite to a Christian state is self-righteousness!

[If contrition be a state pleasing to God, and self-lothing be a necessary constituent of it, then self-righteousness must be most hateful to God, and most injurious to our souls; because it necessarily leads to self-approbation and self-complacency, which are as opposite to self-lothing as darkness is to light. Would to God that this were duly considered! Men profess to repent, and yet make a righteousness of their repentance! a manifest proof that they know not what repentance is! Know, my Brethren, that "all our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags[l]:" that our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of; and, that we must disclaim our best deeds in point of dependence, as much as the vilest sins we ever committed. We may indeed "rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience:" but we shall find cause for self-abhorrence, even in our best frames, and our holiest actions.]

[i] Rom. vii. 24. [k] Ps. li. 17. [l] Isai. lxiv. 6.

2. How dear must Christ be to every true penitent!

[A certain kind and degree of repentance may arise from fear: but that which is spiritual and saving, partakes richly of love. Nothing advances it so much as a sight of the love of Christ in dying for us[m]. Now exactly as a sense of the Saviour's love causes us to lothe ourselves, so does a sense of our own vileness cause us to admire him. Let not any imagine that self-lothing will lead us to despondency: the viler we see ourselves to be, the more will Christ be exalted and magnified in our eyes. Our vileness, as well as our weakness, will only illustrate the riches of his grace, and render him unspeakably precious to our souls.]

[m] Zech. xii. 10.

OUTLINE NO. 1119

GOD'S MERCIES NOT GIVEN FOR OUR MERITS.

Ezek. xxxvi. 32. *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

THERE is not any gift, whether of nature or of grace, from which the pride of man will not take occasion to exalt itself. But the design of God in his Gospel is, to counteract this propensity, and to make his creatures sensible of their obligations to him, and their entire dependence upon him. Hence, having declared, in the preceding context, what he intended to do for his Church and people, he particularly cautions them not to imagine, that he was influenced by any goodness which he saw in them; or that, after having received his blessings, they would have any thing to boast of: for to their latest hour they would have in themselves cause for nothing but shame and confusion.

From this caution the following observations naturally arise:

I. God, in imparting his blessings to us, has not respect to any good in us—

There is not in us any thing meritorious, to which he can have respect—

[Let our actions be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and every one of them will be found wanting. If we had done all that is required of us, we should still be only unprofitable servants[a]. But we have not done all; nor have we done any part as we ought: and therefore instead of having any merit whereon to found a claim of blessings from God, we have need of mercy and forgiveness for our very best actions[b].]

Nor would it consist with his honour to make our goodness the ground of dispensing his favours—

[Whatever the measure of our goodness were, if it were considered in any degree as founding a claim for the Divine blessing, or as inducing God to impart his benefits to us, it would instantly become a ground of glorying before God. The possessor of that goodness might ascribe to himself some portion of the honour, instead of giving the glory of his salvation to God alone. But this would be to subvert the whole design of the Gospel, which is, to exclude boasting[c], and not to give God's glory to another.]

Experience alone sufficiently shews that God is influenced by no such motive—

[If God had respect to any thing that is good in us, the most moral people would always be stirred up to embrace the Gospel, and the most profligate be left to reject it. But this is by no means the case: yea, the very reverse is more generally true, namely, that "publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom, before the more decent Scribes, or self-righteous Pharisees[d]." God is indeed sometimes said to do things for the sake of Abraham, David, and others: but it was not for their righteousness' sake, *considered as meritorious*, that God vouchsafed blessings to them or their posterity; but either to testify his love to obedience, or to manifest the immutability of his counsel[e].]

The text goes yet further, and shews that,

II. There is in us nothing which is not a ground rather for shame and confusion—

Doubtless the Jews were a peculiarly "stiff-necked people:" yet, if we have not the same sins to deplore we have enough to justify the application of this passage to ourselves.

The sins of our unregenerate state may well fill us with confusion—

[a] Luke xvii. 10. [b] Isai. lxiv. 6.
[c] Rom. iii. 27. See also Ezek. xxxvi. 21—23.
[d] Matt. xxi. 31. [e] Deut. vii. 6—8. and ix. 4—6.

[Time may efface many things from our remembrance; but it cannot alter the nature of them, or blot them out of the book of God. Our sins are all in his sight, as if they were transacted but yesterday: and whatever degree of malignity they had formerly, that they retain at this moment: and consequently we should feel on their account all the shame, and sorrow, and confusion that they either did occasion, or ought to have occasioned, at the time they were committed. Yea, the whole mass of evil that ever passed through our minds ought to lie with a weight upon our consciences, so far at least as to produce an abiding sense of our extreme sinfulness.]

The infirmities of our regenerate state also should humble us in the dust before God—

[Who is not conscious of innumerable evils working in his heart? Who does not at some time feel the workings of pride, anger, worldliness, impurity, and various other corruptions? Who does not feel that *these are properly "his own ways,"* and that the exercise of contrary dispositions is the fruit of divine grace?

But let us take the best actions of our lives, and the holiest dispositions of our hearts: what are our prayers and our praises, when compared with the importance of the blessings we have received, or that we desire at God's hands? What is our repentance, when compared with the number and heinousness of our transgressions? What is our trust in God? What our love to the blessed Saviour? What our zeal in his service? Do they bear any proportion to the occasions that call for them? We know that a godly person would be utterly ashamed of such services as a mere formalist makes the ground of his boast and confidence: and would not a perfect Being, if sent down to serve his God on earth, lothe himself, if he were to render no better services than ours? Surely then we ought to blush and be confounded before God, not only for the remains of evil that are within us, but for the very best actions we have ever performed.]

The emphatic manner in which these things are delivered, leads us to notice,

III. The importance of being reminded of these things, and of having them deeply fixed in our hearts—

We are apt to take credit to ourselves, and to think ourselves as high in God's estimation as we are in our own. But God would have us know, that there

is no just ground for our vain conceit: it is even with considerable indignation that he reminds us of it in the words before us. We need to be well instructed in this matter,

1. That we may be led to humility—

[The knowledge of ourselves is indispensably necessary to the attainment of humility: but we must be ignorant indeed of ourselves, if we imagine that there either is, or can be, any thing in us to merit the Divine favour. The truth is, that no words can adequately express the unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness, of our hearts[f]. If we know any thing of ourselves, we cannot but lothe and "abhor ourselves," as Job did, "in dust and ashes[g]." And we need to have our extreme vileness and baseness frequently set before us, in order that we may know what we are, and "not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think[h]."]

2. That we may be excited to thankfulness—

[While we entertain the idea of having purchased, as it were, or merited, the blessings we enjoy, we cannot possibly feel any lively gratitude for them in our hearts: instead of admiring the goodness of our God, we shall be ready to think hardly of him, if at any time his bounties are withdrawn from us. But let us once be convinced of our deep depravity, and we shall wonder that we have not long since been made monuments of divine vengeance. It will then appear no small mercy that we are on praying ground; that we have a covenant-God to flee unto; and that there is a Mediator, through whom we may approach him with an assurance of acceptance. Yes; these things, which are so little regarded by the generality, will make our hearts to overflow with gratitude, and our tongues to sing aloud for joy.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us concede to God the liberty of dispensing his favours according to his own sovereign will—

[To dispute this is *needless;* for he will not ask our permission[i], nor consult our inclination; but "will have mercy on whom he will have mercy[k]" — — — Moreover, it is *ruinous;* for we cannot hope to participate his blessings, if we will not condescend to accept them as they are offered. We must "buy them" indeed, as the Scripture speaks; but it must be "without money and without price[l]." Let us then acknow-

[f] Jer. xvii. 9. [g] Job xlii. 6. [h] Rom. xii. 3.
[i] Job xxxiii. 13. [k] Rom. ix. 18. [l] Isai. lv. 1.

ledge God's right to "do what he will with his own[m];" and abase ourselves before him, as "less than the least of all his mercies[n]."]

2. Let us be thankful that, however unworthy we are, there is a Saviour whose worthiness we may plead before him—

[Though God will not do any thing for *our* sake, yet he will for his dear Son's sake. There is nothing that he will refuse us, if we go to him in the name of Jesus Christ[o]. Nor will our unworthiness be any bar to our acceptance with him. On the contrary, the more we humble and abase ourselves, the more ready will he be to accept and bless us.]

[m] Matt. xx. 15. [n] Gen. xxxii. 10.
[o] John xiv. 13, 14. See a pattern for prayer; Dan. ix. 17—19.

OUTLINE NO. 1120

UNIVERSAL RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Ezek. xxxvii. 1—6. *The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.*

WHILST the Jews at large, and the generality of Christians also, believe that the dispersed of Israel will one day be restored to their own land, there is an assured expectation, both amongst the one and the other, that the Messiah will in due time reign over the face of the whole earth. But, whilst this blessed event is expected by all, there lurks in the minds of the generality a persuasion, that in the present state of the Jews their conversion to Christ is impracticable; and that, whenever it shall be

effected, it will be by some miraculous interposition, like that which took place at their deliverance from Egypt: and hence all attempts to convert them to Christianity are thought nugatory at least, if not presumptuous. In opposition to these discouraging apprehensions, which would paralyze all exertions in their behalf, I have selected this portion of Holy Writ, which meets the objections in the fullest possible manner, and shews, beyond all doubt, that we are bound to use the means which God has appointed for their conversion, and that in the diligent use of those means we may reasonably hope for God's blessing on our labours.

In the preceding chapter are plain and express promises relative to the restoration and conversion of the Jews. In the chapter before us, the same subject is continued in an emblematic form. The Jews in Babylon despaired of ever being restored to their native land. To counteract these desponding fears, there was given to the Prophet Ezekiel a vision, in which the extreme improbability of such an event is acknowledged, whilst the certainty of it is expressly declared. And, lest the import of the vision should be mistaken, it is explained by God himself, and the event predicted in it is foretold in plain and direct terms: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord[a]."

We cannot but admire the goodness and condescension of God, in so accommodating himself to the

[a] ver. 11—14.

weaknesses and wants of men. His people were slow of heart to understand his word; and therefore he "gave them line upon line, and precept upon precept," and exhibited truth to them under every form, if so be they might be able to receive it at last, and to obtain the blessings which he held forth to them in his Gospel.

The restoration promised in the chapter before us does not merely relate to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon. To that indeed is its primary reference; but it manifestly has respect to a recovery from their present state of dispersion, and to a spiritual deliverance from their bondage to sin and Satan: for, not only are the expressions too strong to be confined to a mere temporal deliverance, but the emblem mentioned in the subsequent part of this chapter, of uniting two sticks in the prophet's hand, shews that the whole is to be accomplished, when all the tribes of Israel, as well those which were carried captive to Assyria as those of Judah and Benjamin, shall be reunited under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That this period is yet future, you cannot doubt, when you hear the words of God to the prophet: "Son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.....

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they shall have one Shepherd[b]." These things have never yet been fulfilled; but they shall be fulfilled in their season. What though the Jews be like dry bones scattered over the face of the whole earth? Shall any word that God has spoken respecting them fall to the ground? No: the scattered bones shall be reunited, each to its kindred bone, and they shall rise up an exceeding great army, as the Lord has said.

In explanation of this vision, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The present state of the Jews;

II. Our duty towards them; and

III. Our encouragement to perform it.

Let us consider, First, The present state of the Jews—

Certainly nothing can be well conceived more unpromising than this. The obstacles to their conversion do indeed appear almost insurmountable. One most formidable barrier in their way is, *the extraordinary blindness and hardness of their hearts.* From the very beginning they were, as Moses himself tells them, a stiff-necked people: and their whole history is one continued confirmation of the truth of his assertion; insomuch that any one who is conversant with the sacred records, but unacquainted with the plague of his own heart, would be ready to imagine, that their very blood had received a deeper taint than that of others. Certainly we should have scarcely supposed it possible that human nature should be so corrupt, as they have shewn it to be. We should never have conceived that persons who had witnessed all the wonders which were wrought in their behalf in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, should be so murmuring, so rebellious, so atheistical as they were during their forty years' continuance in the wilderness; and indeed, with the exception of some occasional and partial reformations, even

[b] ver. 16—25.

till their final dispersion by the Romans. It really appears incredible, that, with the Holy Scriptures in their hands, and with the life and miracles of our blessed Lord exhibited before their eyes, they could evince such malignant dispositions towards him, and with such deliberate cruelty imbrue their hands in his blood. Yet such is their state at this hour, that I can have no doubt but that they would reject him again with all the same virulence as before, if he were again to descend from heaven, and to place himself within the reach of their power. His meek and holy conduct would not be sufficient to disarm their malice; nor could all his benevolent miracles conciliate their regard: they would still, as before, cry, "Away with him! crucify him! crucify him!" The same veil is upon their hearts at this day as there was then: and, as far as they can, they actually repeat all the iniquities of their fathers, sanctioning and approving all which they did towards him, and in their hearts transacting it afresh. Such being almost universally the predominant features of their minds, we must acknowledge, that their restoration to life is as improbable as any event that can be contemplated. But whilst I say this, let it not be thought that I mean to cast any uncharitable reflections upon them, or needlessly to asperse their character: for I well know that by nature they are no worse than others. They labour under peculiar disadvantages. From their earliest infancy they are filled with prejudice against the religion of Jesus: they hear him designated by the most opprobrious titles; and are taught to regard him as a vile impostor. This constitutes the chief difference between them, and multitudes who bear the Christian name: ungodly Christians are as averse to real piety as they; but having been taught to reverence the name of Christ, they can hear of it without disgust; whilst the Jews, who have been educated in the most envenomed hatred of it, spurn at it with indignation and abhorrence; and consequently, are proportionably hardened against all his overtures of love and mercy.

Another obstacle in their way is *the contempt in which they are held.* It had been foretold by Moses concerning them, that they should "become an astonishment and a proverb, and a bye-word among all nations[c];" and such they have been ever since their dispersion by the Romans. There is not a quarter of the globe where this prediction is not verified. Mahometans and Heathens of every description pour contempt upon them, and load them with all manner of indignities. Nor have Christians been at all more kindly disposed towards them: on the contrary, we have been foremost in executing upon them the Divine vengeance, just as if our religion, instead of prescribing acts of mercy and love, had dictated nothing but cruelty and oppression. To this hour, the very name of a Jew is amongst us a term of reproach, a symbol of every thing that is odious and contemptible. And what is the natural effect of this? Can we wonder that it should excite resentment in their breasts? Has it not a necessary tendency to embitter them against us, and to make them detest the principles we profess? What can they think of Christianity, when they see such conduct universally practised by its professors? We complain of their blindness and obduracy; but can we wonder at their state, when we ourselves have done, and are yet continually doing, so much to produce it? And what effect has it on ourselves, but to weaken any kind dispositions which may be cherished in the hearts of a few towards them, and to make us despair of ever effecting any thing in their behalf? This effect, I say, it does produce: for, whilst we make extensive efforts for the conversion and salvation of the Heathen, we pass by the Jew with utter disdain, and deride as visionary all endeavours for his welfare. If we saw but a beast fallen into a pit, our bowels of compassion would move towards him, and we should make some efforts for his deliverance: but we behold millions of Jews perishing in their sins, and we never sigh over their lamentable condition, nor use any

[c] Deut. xxviii. 37.

means for the salvation of their souls. They are not allowed even the contingent benefits of social intercourse with us: the wall of partition which God has broken down in his Gospel, is built up by us; as if by general consent they were proscribed, and debarred all access to the light that we enjoy. Their fathers, in the apostolic age, laboured and died for us, when we were sunk in the depths of sin and misery: but we will not stretch out a hand for them, or point them to the rock, on which they may be saved from the overwhelming surge. Thus they are left to famish, whilst the heavenly manna lies around our tents; and they are immured in darkness, whilst we are enjoying all the blessings of the noon-day sun. Say, then, whether this be not a formidable barrier in their way, so as to render their access to the true Messiah beyond measure difficult?

But a yet further obstacle to their conversion arises from *the efforts which they themselves use to prevent the introduction of Christianity among them.* The Rulers of their Church exercise authority over them with a strong hand: and the first appearance among them of an inclination to embrace the Gospel of Christ is checked with great severity. Every species of threatening is used to intimidate those who have begun to ask the way to Zion, and to deter them from prosecuting their inquiries: and, if a person yield to his convictions, and embrace the Gospel, he is instantly loaded with all the odium that can be heaped upon him: every kind of employment is withheld from him; and he would be left to perish with hunger, if he were not aided by those whose principles he has embraced. An apprehension of those evils deters vast multitudes from free inquiry; and constrains not a few to stifle their convictions, because they cannot prevail on themselves to sacrifice their all for Christ.

Such being the present state of the Jews, it may well be asked, "*Can* these bones live?" Can it be hoped that the feeble efforts which we are using should succeed? If, when in Babylon, they despaired,

saying, "Our bones are dried; our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts:" may they not with far greater propriety adopt the same language now? and may not we regard all attempts for their conversion as altogether hopeless, even as hopeless as the resuscitation of dry bones, that have been for ages crumbled into dust?

Yet hopeless as their state appears, we should not be discouraged from performing,

II. Our duty towards them—

The command which God gave to the prophet in my text was *not personal* to him, *but general* to all who are partakers of superior light and liberty. The whole was not a real transaction, but a vision, intended for the instruction of the Church of God in all ages, and especially for those who should be alive at the period destined for the accomplishment of the prophecy. We may consider therefore the directions here given as applicable to ourselves, and as comprising our duty towards the house of Israel. It consists in these two things, *The communicating of instruction to them,* and *The praying unto God for them.*

We should, as far as lies in our power, *communicate instruction to them.* The word "prophecy" does not necessarily import an utterance of predictions; it is often used for the conveying of instruction in the name of God: and this is what we are bound to do to the Jewish people, each of us according to the abilities we possess, and the opportunities that are afforded us. We are not all called to exercise the ministerial office; but we are to impart in conversation the knowledge we have received. No Christian whatever is to put his light under a bushel or a bed, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to those who are within the sphere of its influence. If we have but one talent, we are to use it for the honour of our God, and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

But here it is to be regretted, that the generality of Christians are themselves destitute of the information which they are called upon to communicate. Nor is

this true of the laity only: even those who bear the ministerial office are by no means so well instructed in the points at issue between the Jews and us, as to be competent to the task of entering into controversy with the more learned Jews. Even those ministers who have somewhat of a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, are for the most part but ill furnished with that species of knowledge which qualifies them for instructing the Jews. They are not aware of the principal objections of the Jews to Christianity, nor of the answers which ought to be given to them. Even the peculiar excellencies of the Christian system, as contradistinguished from Judaism, are not so familiar to them as they ought to be. With Heathens they can argue, and with different sects of Christians they can maintain their stand: but so utterly have they disregarded and despised the Jew, that they have thought it not worth their while to furnish themselves with knowledge suited to his case. This is greatly to the shame of Christians in general, and of Christian Ministers in particular. Nor does it offer any just excuse for our continuing to neglect the Jews, since we ought instantly to make ourselves acquainted with all that is necessary for the conviction of our Jewish Brother; and in the mean time should procure for him, from others, the instruction which we ourselves are unable to impart. This is what we should do, if we saw a brother perishing of wounds that had been inflicted on him: we should not account our want of medical skill as any reason for neglecting his case; but we should endeavour to procure for him from others the aid he stood in need of. And this is what we should do for his soul, procuring for him such books as are suited to his capacity, and bringing him into contact with such persons as are better qualified than ourselves to enlighten and instruct his soul.

To withhold these efforts under an idea that God will convert them without the instrumentality of man, is to belie our consciences, and to deceive our own souls. Such an excuse is nothing but a veil to cover

our own supineness. Where has God told us that he will convert them without means? He did not do so even on the day of Pentecost. He has commanded that "his Gospel should be preached in all the world, to every creature." Where has he made them an exception? This I say, then, that our duty towards them is, to use all possible means for the illumination of their minds, and for the conversion of their souls to the faith of Christ.

But it is our duty at the same time to *pray for them.* The prophet was not only to prophesy to the dry bones, but to "say, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath! (O thou eternal Spirit!) and breathe upon these slain, that they may live[d]." Whoever may attempt to convey instruction, it will be attended with little benefit, if God do not accompany the word with power from on high. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone that can give the increase." If we set about any thing in our own strength, and expect any thing from the means, without looking directly to God in and through the means, we shall be rebuked, and left without success; just as Elisha was, when he expected his staff to raise to life the widow's child[e]. Like the prophet in our text, we are to pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit to give efficacy to the word. To this effect we are taught by God himself; "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth[f]." If we conscientiously combine our personal exertions with fervent prayer, there is not any thing which we may not hope for. Wonderful is the efficacy of fervent and believing prayer: and, if we employ it diligently in behalf of the Jews, desperate as their condition to all appearance is, it shall prevail, to the bringing forth of their souls from the prison in which they are

[d] ver. 9. [e] 2 Kings iv. 29—31. [f] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

immured, and for the introducing of them into the light and liberty of God's dear children.

True it is, we may without any saving influences of the Spirit effect a previous work, like that of bringing together the kindred bones, and causing the flesh and skin to come upon them: but God alone can breathe life into them. We may bring them possibly to "a form of godliness; but God alone can give the power:" and it is only when our "word comes to men in demonstration of the Spirit," that it ever proves "the power of God to the salvation" of their souls.

Such is our duty towards them: and that we may not draw back from it through despondency, let us consider,

III. Our encouragement to perform it—

We have the express promise of God to render it effectual. What can we want more? The promise is repeated again and again; "Ye *shall* live;" "Ye *shall* live;" "I will bring you up out of your graves, and ye *shall* live[g]." And is not God able to do it? Look at the heavens and the earth: Hath he created all these out of nothing? hath he spoken them into existence by the word of his mouth, and is he not able to effect the conversion of the Jews? Has he declared that he will raise the dead at the last day, and bring into judgment every child of man; and cannot he, who shall accomplish that in its season, effect this also at the appointed time? True, the bones are, as he has said, "dry, very dry:" but they are not beyond the reach of his power. What if the resuscitation of them be "marvellous in our eyes, must it therefore be marvellous in God's eyes?" (Zech. viii. 6.) His word in the mouth of Jews has been effectual for the conversion of the Gentiles; and that same word in the mouth of Gentiles shall be effectual for the conversion of the Jews: for "his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." "Hath he

[g] ver. 5, 6, 12, 14.

said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Tell me, Did he not bring out his people from Egypt at the appointed time? Yes, "at the self-same hour did he bring them forth, with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm." In like manner he delivered them also in due season from Babylon, according to his word: and these are sure pledges, that he will in due season fulfil all his promises towards them, and not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail.

In dependence on his promise, then, we should address ourselves to the work assigned us. We should go forth feeling the utter hopelessness of our task, and say, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" The greater the difficulty appears, the more should we hold fast our confidence in God, with whom nothing is impossible. We should go, as it were, into the midst of that vast theatre, and lift up our voice without either distrust or fear. If the means already used have proved ineffectual, we should, like Elisha, exert ourselves with the more earnestness, and labour more fervently in prayer with God for his blessing on our endeavours. In order to raise the son of the Shunamite, he cried mightily to the Lord, and went in and stretched himself upon the child, applying his mouth, his eyes, his hands, to the mouth, the eyes, the hands of the child[h]: and thus should we go in to our Jewish Brethren: we should address ourselves to the work in the length and breadth of all our powers, accommodating ourselves to the measure and capacity of every individual amongst them, and labouring in every possible way to inspire them with love to Christ: and, if we see as yet but little effect, (as was at first the case with that holy prophet,) let us "not despise the day of small things," but let us look upon the smallest success as an earnest of greater things, as the first-fruits before the harvest, and as the drop before the shower. Two things in particular I wish you to notice in the text: the one is, that GOD WROUGHT NOTHING TILL THE PROPHET

[h] 2 Kings iv. 33—35.

USED THE APPOINTED MEANS; and the other is, that HE WROUGHT EFFECTUALLY AS SOON AS THE MEANS WERE USED. This is twice noticed by the prophet in the verses following my text: "So I prophesied as I was commanded; and *as I prophesied, the bones came together:*" and again, "*So I prophesied as he commanded me; and the breath came into them, and they lived*[1]." Let this, I pray you, sink down into your ears: only let this be understood and felt, and acted upon; and I shall have gained a point of the utmost importance to the Jewish cause: for, however inadequate to the end our efforts be, God requires us to put them forth; and when they are put forth in humility and faith, he will bless them to the desired end. To EXPECT THE BLESSING WITHOUT USING THE MEANS, OR TO DESPAIR OF SUCCESS IN THE USE OF THEM, IS EQUALLY WRONG. What he has commanded, we must do: and what he has promised, we must expect. Be the difficulties ever so great, we must not stagger at the promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Our blessed Lord, when Mary imagined that her brother was gone beyond a possibility of recovery, said to her, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" so to you I say, Be not discouraged by thinking how long our brother has been dead, or how corrupt he is; but expect assuredly, that at the sound of Jesus' voice he shall rise out of his grave and come forth to life.

Permit me now to ADDRESS myself to you in a more particular manner: and,

1. *To those whose exertions are paralyzed by despondency.*

I object not to a full consideration of all the difficulties that obstruct the conversion of the Jews. I wish them to be viewed in their utmost extent: but then they should be viewed, not as grounds for relaxing our efforts, but as motives to the most strenuous exertion. With the generality, these desponding

[1] ver. 7, 10.

fears are only excuses for their own supineness: they have no compassion for their perishing fellow-creatures, no zeal for the honour of their God, and therefore they cry, "A lion is in the way." But this is a very unworthy recompence for all the exertions which the Jews of former ages made for us. What if they had said respecting the Gentiles, "They are bowing down to stocks and stones, and it is in vain to attempt their conversion?" we should have continued in our ignorance and guilt to the present hour. It was by their unremitting labours that the Gospel was spread; and to them we owe all the light and peace that we at this moment enjoy. Let us then imitate them: let us employ our talents and our influence in their service: let us combine together for the purpose of promoting their welfare more extensively than we could do by individual exertion: and whilst we go forward in dependence on the promises of our God, let us remember, that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform."

As for the idea that the Lord's time is not come, who is authorized to declare that? The great events that are going forward in the world give us reason to think that the time is come, or at least is very near at hand. The prophecies themselves, in the judgment of many wise and sober interpreters, appear to point to the present times, as the season for their approaching accomplishment. And certainly the attention now paid to the subject by the Christian world, and the success that has hitherto attended their efforts, are encouraging circumstances to confirm our hopes, and stimulate our exertions. We may add too, that the zeal that has been manifested of late for the universal diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, and for the conversion of the heathen, is a call from God to the Christian world, to consider the wants of his ancient people: and the general expectation of the Jews at this time, that their Messiah will soon appear, is a still further call to us to point out the Saviour to them. Nor can I pass by without notice two most astonishing events; one of which has lately occurred

in a foreign country, and the other is at this moment arising in our own. In Russia, God has raised up a friend for his people, another Cyrus, in the head of that vast empire; who has assigned one, if not more places in his dominions, where the Jews who shall embrace Christianity may find a safe asylum, and enjoy all necessary means of providing for themselves, agreeably to their former habits. In our own land, an unprecedented concern begins to manifest itself in behalf of all the nations of the earth who are lying in darkness and the shadow of death. The duty of sending forth missionaries to instruct them, is now publicly acknowledged by all our governors in Church and State; and in a short time will the whole community, from the highest to the lowest, be invited to unite in this blessed work[k]. And in this ebullition of religious zeal, can we suppose that the Jew shall be forgotten? Shall those to whom we ourselves are indebted for all the light that we enjoy, be overlooked? Will it not be remembered, that our blessed Lord and Saviour was a Jew; and that it is a Jew who is at this moment interceding for us at the right hand of God? Shall not our obligations to him and his Apostles be requited by a due attention to those who were the first in his estimation, and are yet "beloved by him for their fathers' sakes?" We must on no account overlook them: we must consider them as comprehended in the general commission: and let us hope that there will be a simultaneous effort through the land, to carry into effect the pious and benevolent designs of our governors.

An erroneous idea has obtained, that because it is said by St. Paul, "that blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in[l]," the great harvest of the Gentiles must be reaped before the sickle is put to the Jewish field. But this is directly contrary to what the same Apostle says in the very same chapter, where he

[k] In the Prince Regent's Letter, read in all the Churches through the kingdom, in 1815.

[l] Rom. xi. 25.

represents "the fulness of the Jews as being the riches of the Gentiles[m]." It is the commencement, and not the completion, of the in-gathering of the Gentiles, that marks the season for the conversion of the Jews: and therefore the stir which there is at this moment amongst the Gentile world, is, amongst other signs of the times, a proof, that the time for the conversion of the Jews is near at hand. Away then with all desponding fears; and to every obstruction that presents itself in your way, say, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[n]."

Let me next ADDRESS myself,

2. *To those who desire to be accomplishing this great work.*

You will reasonably ask, What shall we do in order to advance this blessed cause? To this I answer, Be much in prayer to God for them. Were the Christian world more earnest in prayer to God for the restoration and salvation of his people, I feel no doubt but that God would arise and have mercy upon Zion, and that a great work would speedily be wrought among them. When the angel interceded for Jerusalem, saying, "O Lord God, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?" Jehovah, we are told, answered him with good and comfortable words[o]. And, if a spirit of intercession for them prevailed amongst us, God would answer, not by good and comfortable words only, but by great and powerful acts, even by the displays of his pardoning grace, and the manifestations of his long-suspended love. United prayer brought Peter out of his prison: and united prayer would bring the Jews also out of their graves; and they should arise before us "an exceeding great army."

Still however, as human means also are to be used, I would say, Form yourselves into societies and associations for the advancement of this work. Much may be done by united and systematic exertion, which

[m] Rom. xi. 12. [n] Zech. iv. 6, 7. [o] Zech. i. 12, 13.

cannot possibly be done without it: funds will be raised; and many will be stirred up to join with you, who would neither have inclination nor ability to do much in a way of solitary effort: and, if God has given to any one a talent of wealth or influence, let him improve it to the uttermost. It is scarcely to be conceived how much a single individual may effect, provided he set himself diligently to the work. God has said he will "bring his people one of a city and two of a family," yea, that "he will bring them to Zion one by one." And if only *one* be brought from darkness unto light, and from death to life, it is worth all our efforts: for one single soul is of greater value than the whole world. Let us up then, and be doing; for the Lord is with us: and if we see not immediately all the effect we could wish, we have the satisfaction of knowing that God approves of the desire, and that, like David, we are gathering stones which our successors shall erect into a temple of the Lord.

But let it not content us to proselyte the Jews to mere nominal Christianity. It is to no purpose to bring their bones together, and cover them with flesh, unless their souls be made alive to God, and they become living members of Christ's mystical body. In the close of the chapter from whence our text is taken, God informs us what is to characterize the conversion of the Jews to Christ: "David, my servant, (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ,) shall be King over them; and they shall all have one Shepherd: my servant David shall be their Prince for ever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and my tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.[p]" Yes, this is vital Christianity; this is the only true religion that can benefit *us;* and therefore it is that to which we must endeavour to convert *them.* I ask of you, my Brethren, What is it that comforts you, but a view of the everlasting covenant, "ordered in all things and sure?" What is it that enables you

[p] ver. 24—27.

to live above the things of time and sense, and to look forward with joy to the eternal world; what is it, I say, but a hope, that you stand in this near relation to a reconciled God, and a persuasion, that that Saviour, whose you are and whom you serve, will bruise Satan under your feet, and make you more than conquerors over all your enemies? Bear this in mind then, I pray you, in all your conversations with Jews, and in all your efforts for their good. Aim at nothing short of this. To convince them by argument is nothing, unless you bring them to a life of faith upon the Son of God, and to a life of entire devotedness to his service. This you must first experience in your own souls, else you can never hope to effect it in theirs. Let them see in you how truly blessed a life of faith is; and what a sanctifying efficacy it has on your hearts and lives. Let them see, that it is not a merely speculative opinion about the Lord Jesus Christ, to which you would convert them, but to the enjoyment of his love, to a participation of his image, and to a possession of his glory. In a word, be yourselves among them as living epistles of Christ, that in you they may read the excellency of his salvation: then may you hope to prevail with them; and that they will gladly unite themselves to you, when they shall see that God is with you of a truth.

OUTLINE NO. 1121

SOULS QUICKENED BY THE GOSPEL.

Ezek. xxxvii. 11—13. *Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.*

THE writings both of the Old and New Testament abound with allegories; but the interpretation of them is generally given by the writers themselves.

Many of our Lord's discourses were of this nature: they are admirably calculated to convey instruction. We have a very remarkable allegory in this chapter. The prophet sees in a vision a valley of dry bones; he is interrogated with respect to the possibility of their living; he is commanded to bid them live in the name of the Lord. On issuing the proclamation he perceived a noise among the bones; the bones shook, and came, each to its kindred bone; the sinews, flesh, and skin, then came upon them: lastly, in answer to his prayer, life was communicated to them. This allegory is then interpreted by God himself. It describes the state of the Jews in Babylon, and their unexpected deliverance from it. But it may be properly considered as relating to the deliverance of God's people from the sorer bondage of sin.

We shall take occasion from the text to consider,

I. The state of unregenerate men—

The Jews in Babylon were as unlikely to return to a state of political existence, as dry bones are to the functions of animal life. They themselves despaired of such an event (ver. 11). Their condition fitly represents that of the unregenerate—

The unregenerate are dead, even as dry bones—

[In this light they are represented by the Apostle[a]. They are destitute of all inclination or ability to serve God[b]: they have not a sufficiency even for the smallest good[c]."]

They not unfrequently despair of ever obtaining deliverance—

[Despondency is far more common than is generally supposed. Many imagine, like Job, that they are given over by God[d]: hence they express themselves like the desponding Jews[e]—.]

They are not, however, beyond the reach of mercy—

This will appear by considering,

II. The means by which God delivers them from it—

God can work by the meanest and most contemptible means—

[a] Eph. ii. 1. [b] Phil. ii. 13. [c] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[d] Compare Lam. iii. 18. and Job xix. 10. [e] Jer. ii. 25.

[By the sound of rams' horns he overthrew Jericho: by the stroke of Elijah's mantle he parted the waters of Jordan: so, by the preaching of his Gospel he quickens the dead.]

He commands his power and grace to be proclaimed—

[He is an almighty, all-sufficient God. He promises pardon to all who seek it in his appointed way. He offers his Spirit to renew all who call upon him. He assures the believing soul that it shall never perish[f]. Thus he encourages the weakest and the vilest to look unto him[g].]

In this way he accomplishes the deliverance of his people—

[A gradual change is made in the most obdurate sinners. There is a "great army," of whom it may be said as of the prodigal[h]—: they go forth immediately to "the promised land."]

Nor does any one remain ignorant of his benefactor—

This leads us to consider,

III. The effects which this deliverance produces—

While dead in sin we imagine we must quicken ourselves—

[We know not the depth of misery into which we are fallen. We little think how great a change must take place upon us; nor are we aware how entirely destitute we are of strength.]

But when once we are quickened, we see whence our deliverance came—

[We feel by experience the truth of Jeremiah's assertion[i]—. We see that the Apostles themselves were only God's instruments[k]. Then we know God to be the Lord, the source of every good. We learn also to commit all our ways to him.]

INFER—

1. How valuable are the ordinances of religion!

[God makes use of his ordinances for the most glorious purposes. He works principally in and by them[l]. They who neglect them are generally left in darkness; but sincere worshippers reap the greatest benefit from them. Let us never

[f] Isai. xli. 10. [g] Isai. xlv. 22. [h] Luke xv. 24.
[i] Jer. xiii. 23. [k] 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. [l] Rom. x. 17.

then grow weary of attending them: let us use them with a dependence on God for his blessing.]

2. What care has God taken to encourage desponding sinners!

[No state can be worse than this represented in the text[m]; yet God has shewn how he could overrule the heart of Cyrus to proclaim liberty, and of his own people to accept it. He displayed also his mighty power in re-establishing his people; what then can he not do for those who are dead in sin? Let none say, "My hope is lost, I am cut off." Let it be remembered that the power and grace of Christ are sufficient[n]. Let every one hear in faith the Apostle's exhortation[o]—.]

[m] ver. 2. "very dry." [n] John xi. 25. [o] Eph. v. 14.

OUTLINE NO. 1122

THE STICKS OF JUDAH AND OF EPHRAIM JOINED.

Ezek. xxxvii. 15—22. *The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick; and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.*

THE restoration of the whole Jewish people, to their own land, and to the favour of their God, is a subject on which all the prophets dwell with great

delight; and not with delight only, but with the strongest confidence and assurance. There were indeed then, and there are still, in that nation, circumstances which, if viewed only after the manner of men, render the accomplishment of these predictions highly improbable. For instance; the whole people of Israel, of the ten tribes which were carried captive to Assyria, and of the two tribes in their present dispersion, are scattered, like dry bones, over the face of the whole earth: and we might as well expect a restoration of such scattered bones to life, as the return of that people to their own land. Moreover, from the period of their separation in the time of Rehoboam, to the latest hour of their existence as different states, there existed between them such inveterate hatred, as precludes a hope that they can ever be united into one people again. But the Prophet Ezekiel was inspired to declare, that both these difficulties should be overcome. The resuscitation of the dry bones he has foretold in the preceding part of the chapter; and the re-union of the two nations he foretells in the words which we have just read. He was commanded to represent this to his hearers by a very appropriate sign. He was to take two sticks; and, writing on each of them the nation which it was intended to represent, he was to cause them to become one stick in his hand; and then to explain to them the figure, by a full declaration of God's purpose relative to their re-union in the latter-day.

His words will lead us to contemplate,

I. The event predicted—

The sign itself, just like the blossoming of Aaron's rod, whilst all the others retained their own proper form without any such alteration, was a convincing proof, that the prophet both spake and acted under a divine commission. The causing of two sticks, without any previous process, in an instant to become one in his hand, was a pledge to the spectators that the prediction, however improbable, should certainly

be fulfilled. Accustomed to be taught by signs, the spectators desired an explanation of that which was now before their eyes. And the prophet informed them, that it imported and prefigured,

1. The restoration of all the tribes to their own land—

[The names inscribed upon the two different sticks clearly shewed that the ten tribes which had been carried captive to Assyria, no less than the two who were then in Babylon, should at a future period be restored; and that all of them together should form one nation, as they had done in the days of David and of Solomon: and that they should never be divided into two nations again[a]. This has never yet been fulfilled; and therefore we know it shall receive its accomplishment at a period yet future. To confirm this from many passages of Scripture would be quite superfluous: for if the return of all the tribes to their own land at a future period be questioned, there is not any prediction of a future event that can be depended on. It is not necessary that the whole mass of the Jewish people should return: for there were but forty thousand that returned from Babylon; yet was that deemed a sufficient accomplishment of the prophecies relating to that event. So, if there be only a few millions that return to their own land in the latter-day, it will amply suffice to verify the predictions respecting it. But return they shall, as surely as ever the two sticks became one in the prophet's hand. And to this effect speaks the Prophet Isaiah, whose words I record as illustrating and confirming, beyond a possibility of doubt, the declarations in my text: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up his ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly, upon the shoulders of the Philistines, toward the west: they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian Sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and

[a] ver. 22, 25.

shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people which shall be left from Assyria; like as it was to Israel, in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt[b]."]

2. The union of them all under Christ as their common Head—

[Never have they been all under the government of one king since the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam: much less has there been any king of the name of David that could lay claim to this dominion. But, at the period referred to, they shall all, even the whole twelve tribes, become one nation again; and *that* too under the government of the Messiah, who is frequently foretold under the name of David, and who in the New Testament also is recognized as raised up of David's house, and as sitting upon David's throne[c]. They will all form one flock under him, as their "Shepherd," as, both in a preceding chapter and in that before us, is fully declared[d]. They will be deeply sensible of their error, in having so long rejected him; and will then "look on Him whom they, no less than their fathers, have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, even as one that mourneth for his first-born son." And no longer will they cast off his light and easy yoke: yea rather, they will delight in him, and glory in him, as "all their salvation and all their desire." To this effect the Prophet Hosea also most plainly speaks: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim. Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter-days[e]."]

3. Their enjoyment of God, as their covenant-God and portion—

[A new covenant will God make with them in that day, widely different from that which he made with their fathers, when he brought them forth out of Egypt[f]. In the new covenant, provision shall be made for the remission of all their sins, for the mortification of all their lusts, and for their entire restoration both to the favour and to the image of their God[g]. In former days, God dwelt with them visibly, by the bright Shechinah, the symbol of his presence; and in his tabernacle he revealed himself in a way that he never had done to any

[b] Isai. xi. 11—16. [c] Luke i. 31—33, 69.
[d] ver. 22, 24, 25. and Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. [e] Hos. iii. 4, 5.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 31—34. [g] ver. 23—26.

people from the foundation of the world; avouching himself to be their God, and them to be his peculiar people[h]. And again, at the latter-day will his manifestations of himself to them be not a whit less bright and glorious, insomuch that all the nations of the world shall be constrained to acknowledge them as the people whom, above all others upon earth, Jehovah has been pleased to bless and honour[i]. Their holiness and happiness will far transcend any thing experienced by their forefathers; "the light of the moon will become as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[k]."

Now, from these things will be seen what is the true character of the Millennium. It is not in their external state that the Jews will be changed, more than in the state of their souls before God. In truth, it is the spiritual change which will chiefly mark the glory of their latter-day: it will consist not so much in any political revolution, like that of the restoration of the Jews to their own land, as in the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and the subjugation of the whole world to the obedience of Christ.]

The sign intimated by the prophet having been realized before the eyes of his people, having assured to us the accomplishment of his prophecy, we will proceed to contemplate,

II. The prediction verified—

Let us place ourselves on an eminence, and behold it, as it were, accomplishing before our eyes. Behold in it,

1. What a display of God's power!

[The Scriptures speak highly of God's power in raising up such an innumerable seed from Abraham and Sarah, at a time when, according to the course of nature, they could have no hope of any progeny. Greatly also is his power magnified in bringing out that nation from their bondage in Egypt. The deliverance also of the Jews from Babylon is marked, as illustrating in no ordinary degree the boundless power of Jehovah. But all of these together are nothing, in comparison of that power which he will display, when he shall, in every quarter of the globe, convert the souls of his ancient people, and restore them in safety to their former inheritance. We

[h] ver. 27. with Rev. xxi. 2, 3. [i] ver. 28.
[k] Isai. xxx. 26.

are particularly told, that the redemption from Egypt will then no longer be mentioned, by reason of the more glorious deliverance which will be vouchsafed unto them.]

2. What a proof of his veracity!

[God promised to Abraham and his descendants the full and entire possession of the land of Canaan: yet it was four hundred and thirty years, before either he or his posterity possessed, with the exception of a burial-place, so much ground as to set his foot upon. Their deliverance from Egypt had been predicted; but their deliverance was delayed so long, that if it had continued one day longer, God's promise to Abraham would have been broken. But behold, on the self-same day he brought them forth; and thereby he shewed himself mindful of the promise which he had given above four hundred years before. At the expiration, too, of seventy years, the time fixed for their captivity in Babylon, God brought them forth from thence also. As to the time fixed for their return from their present dispersion, we are unable with certainty to declare precisely when it shall arrive: but, according to every calculation, we have reason to believe it fast approaching; and at the appointed period the event shall assuredly be accomplished. And how wonderfully will it attest the unchangeableness of God, "not one jot or tittle of whose word can ever fail!"]

3. What an exhibition of his grace!

[The sovereignty of God was clearly shewn, in his choice of Abraham from the midst of an idolatrous family and nation: nor less so in limiting his blessings to the lines of Isaac and Jacob, to the exclusion of the elder branches of Ishmael and Esau. Every part of the Divine administration towards the people of Israel gives, in like manner, ample demonstration of the sovereignty of his grace. The preservation, too, of that people, as distinct from all the nations of the earth, proves, that nothing shall, or ever can, defeat the purposes of his grace. Certainly, if any thing could prevail on God to annul his covenant, the conduct of that people must have done it. From the very beginning, they were a disobedient and stiff-necked people. In the wilderness itself, yea, and even at the Red Sea, where such a wonderful interposition had appeared in their favour, they rebelled against their God. At all times were they ready to cast off their allegiance to God, and to place their confidence on stocks and stones. And at last they filled up the measure of their iniquities, by rejecting their Messiah, and crucifying the Lord of glory. To all this we may add their long impenitence, during eighteen centuries, notwithstanding they know and acknowledge that they are

cast off from God on account of their impieties. How astonishing, then, will the freeness and richness of God's grace appear, when he shall take *these* persons from their dispersion, revealing himself to *them*, bringing *them* forth from every corner of the earth, manifesting the Saviour to *them*, and returning himself to *them* as their covenant God and portion! If, in the election of them at first, the grace of God was eminently displayed, much more will it be glorified in such mercies vouchsafed to them after such heinous and manifold transgressions.]

4. What a call to the whole world to serve and obey him!

[God has spoken in his works; but his voice is not heard. He has also spoken by his word; but that word is known to a very small part of mankind. But in that day he will speak to all the whole world at once; and in such terms, that it will be impossible for any to misapprehend his meaning. In the chapter before us he has said, "The heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore[l]." The Jews are spread in almost every part of the world. Their conversion to God being simultaneous in every country, it will attract the attention of all, and create a vast sensation through the whole world. The victories, too, which they will gain over all who shall oppose their establishment in their own land will yet further demonstrate, not only that God is with them, but that there is no other God but He. They will be struck, as Baal's worshippers were by the fire which descended from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice; and will exclaim, with wonder and amazement, "The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!" Instantly will multitudes, in every place, "lay hold on the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we see that God is with you of a truth[m]." In truth, it will be a signal to all mankind to acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Saviour; and it will "be as life from the dead[n]" to the whole world.]

ADDRESS—

[And now, brethren, be ye all as one stick in my hand: and let every one amongst you, whatever be the diversity of his age or station, submit to Christ as your King, and live in dependence on him as your Shepherd. Enter now into "God's covenant of peace," that you may be partakers of all its privileges and blessings. Let God himself dwell in you,

[l] ver. 28. [m] Zech. viii. 23. [n] Rom. xi. 15.

as in his temple of old: be ye altogether a people unto him, and let him be your God and portion for ever. These blessings will characterize the Millennial age, and be vouchsafed in a more abundant measure to his people that shall hereafter return unto him: yet are they to be enjoyed at this present hour by all who truly believe in Christ. Why then should so much as one of you remain destitute of these blessings? May God of his infinite mercy make you all like-minded in relation to them! and may the time quickly arrive, when God's ancient people shall experience them in their souls, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God!"]

DANIEL.

OUTLINE NO. 1123

THE STONE THAT BECAME A MOUNTAIN.

Dan. ii. 44. *In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

THE various revolutions of kingdoms, how casual and contingent soever they may appear, all are foreordained in the inscrutable counsels of the Deity, and made subservient to the accomplishment of his eternal purpose; indeed they seem to be marked in Scripture solely in reference to the Church of God; as though the rise and fall of empires were scarcely worth a mention, except as they accelerate or retard the progress of true religion. In the time of the Babylonish captivity God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a very remarkable dream, and interpreted it to him by the Prophet Daniel. There appeared to him an image, whose head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet of iron and clay; on the feet of which a stone fell, that utterly demolished the whole. This foretold the succession of four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom upon the ruins of them all.

For the elucidation of this subject, it will be proper to consider,

I. The prophecy itself—

In which we notice,

1. The time and manner of its establishment—

[*The time of its establishment* is here clearly marked. The Babylonish, Persian, and Grecian monarchies, were to rise in succession, each on the ruins of that which preceded it; and at last the Roman empire was to swallow up, as it were, and comprehend them all. And "in the time of the kings" belonging to this last kingdom, even while they should enjoy the utmost plenitude of their power, another kingdom was to arise, the kingdom of the Messiah. This was accurately accomplished; for Christ was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, when the Roman empire was at the summit of its strength and grandeur: and, within the space of about fifty years from that time, his kingdom was spread, not only over Judæa, but over a great part of the known world.

The manner of it is also plainly declared. It was foretold that a "stone which should be cut out without hands, should break in pieces this vast image;" that "the God of heaven should set up a kingdom" solely by his own power, *without the intervention of human force or policy*; or, to use the words of another prophet, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." This also was remarkably fulfilled in the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world. The persons who were his principal agents, were a few illiterate fishermen, alike untutored in philosophy, and unassisted by the authority of earthly magistrates. They were expressly forbidden to use the sword[a]; and the most learned of all the apostles suppressed every thing that savoured of carnal wisdom, lest he should make the cross of Christ of none effect[b]. Yet, notwithstanding their weapons were not carnal, they were mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin and Satan[c]. And indeed the heavenly treasure was committed thus to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power might more evidently appear to be of God[d].]

2. The extent and duration of its power—

[It was to have the pre-eminence above all other kingdoms in respect of *its extent*. All the monarchies referred to by the prophet were great and powerful; but this far excelled them all. The stone cut out without hands fell upon the feet of the image which were of iron and clay, and broke the whole image in pieces; intimating that the kingdom of Christ should prevail over the Roman empire together with the other monarchies which were comprehended in it: all the powers of the world were to be as nothing before it. This was represented

[a] Matt. xxvi. 52. [b] 1 Cor. i. 17. and ii. 1.
[c] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [d] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

in the vision by "the stone becoming a mountain, and this mountain filling the earth." Christianity is to prevail over the whole earth. The idolatries of Pagan Rome yielded to the sublimer principles of the Gospel; and the superstitions of antichrist, which for a long season obscured divine truth, have in a measure fallen, and shall in due time vanish before its light and influence. Nor shall the authority of Christ extend, like that of earthly monarchs, merely over the bodies of men: it shall reach unto their souls, and "bring into subjection the very thoughts and desires of their hearts." There shall not be one disaffected subject in his whole empire: the happiness of all his people shall be bound up in their Prince, whose will shall be their only law, and whose honour their only aim.

It was to excel all others also in *its duration*. All other kingdoms have fallen, and shall fall; nor can the best constituted governments maintain their stability beyond the time allotted them in the Divine counsels. But the kingdom of Christ "shall stand for ever;" his power shall "never be transferred to other hands;" nor shall any revolutions shake the foundations of his throne. "He shall put down all rule and all authority and power, and reign till all his enemies are become his footstool[e]." The precise mode of administering his kingdom will indeed terminate when there shall be no more subjects upon earth to govern: but the kingdom itself will exist in heaven to all eternity, when it shall be delivered up into the Father's hands, and God shall be all in all[f].]

To improve this subject aright, we must distinctly mark,

II. The practical use of the prediction—

Whilst it prepares us to expect the perfect triumph of Christianity, to the enemies of Christ's kingdom it speaks terror—

[Persons may be enemies of Christ's kingdom either by denying the truth of Christianity, or by resisting its influence.

[e] 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

[f] The perpetuity of this kingdom was afterwards revealed to Daniel, with some additional circumstances, in a vision similar to that before us. The four great monarchies appeared to him as four great beasts, the last of which had ten horns, corresponding with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and intimating that ten smaller powers should grow out of that fourth monarchy, all of which should in due season fall before the kingdom of Christ, which was then to become universal in its extent, and everlasting in its continuance. Dan. vii. 3—7, 14.

But whether we be professed infidels or merely nominal Christians, the subject before us is highly proper for our consideration. Whence came this marvellous correspondence between the predictions and the accomplishment of them, if Christianity be not of divine original? was it not established at the very time that was fixed in this prophecy? And has it not prevailed, not only without the aid of human authority, but in direct opposition to all the power and policy of the confederate world? And if it have broken in pieces so many adverse powers, and "made them even as the chaff of the summer threshing-floors," shall any of us withstand it with impunity? Our Lord, in reference to this very passage, has assured us, that "on whomsoever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powder[g]." But remember, it is not a feigned or forced submission that is required of us: Christ reigns over a willing people, and must be enthroned in their hearts. Let such be his influence over you, my Brethren ——— Let "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ be put down." Let his law be your only rule, his honour your highest aim, and his service your supreme delight.]

To the friends and subjects of Christ, on the other hand, it is replete with comfort—

[As Christianity has not prevailed in the world without much opposition, so neither will it gain a complete ascendency over the heart without many conflicts. But should any one despond because his adversaries are mighty? We need only look at the prevalence of Christianity in the world, and we may see what shall be accomplished in our hearts. Are we destitute of any power in ourselves? Be it so: yet the stone which was cut out without hands, and became a great mountain, shall crush our enemies, and bring our inmost souls into subjection to Christ. If the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against the Church at large, neither shall they against the weakest member of it. If the greatest empires have yielded to the influence of the Gospel, so shall also the most inveterate lusts. Let Christians then lift up their heads with joy: their conflicts may be severe, but victory is assured to them by the promise and oath of an unchanging God[h].]

[g] Matt. xxi. 43, 44. See also Isai. lx. 12. [h] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

OUTLINE NO. 1124

THE HEBREW YOUTHS IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

Dan. iii. 28. *Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.*

A BRIGHTER example of fidelity to God than that before us is not to be found in all the records of antiquity. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, full of pride and vain-glory, determined to erect an image of gold that should be worshipped as a god. The image was above thirty yards in height, and three in breadth; and all covered over with plates of solid gold. The expense of making this image must have been immense; and it puts to shame the worshippers of Jehovah, who grudge to expend their money for the promotion of his glory. The image being erected, the chief men in all the provinces of the empire were summoned to attend at the dedication of it, and, at a given signal, to bow down and worship it. The three Hebrew youths mentioned in our text, having been set over different provinces, were necessitated to be present at the ceremony, but, being convinced of the sinfulness of idolatry, they would not themselves be guilty of it. As far as they could conscientiously obey their king, they would: but where there remained no alternative but to disobey him, or to offend their God, they determined to "obey God rather than man."

To bring their history more fully under our view, let us notice,

I. Their fidelity—

They were certainly under great temptation to comply with the wishes of the king—

[They were under far different circumstances from the rest of the governors that were assembled on this occasion. They were not merely subjects, but captives, who were entirely at

the king's mercy. They were also under peculiar obligations to the king, who had educated them at his own expense, and had even invested them with authority over whole provinces of his native subjects. These considerations were calculated to operate strongly on their minds, and to render them somewhat less scrupulous than they would otherwise have been about a single infringement of the Divine law. A sense of duty to their king, and of gratitude to their benefactor, might seem to justify a small deviation from the stricter path of duty. They might possibly compare the act required of them with the conduct of the whole Jewish nation, both priests and people: the Jews had erected idols of their own, and, of their own free-will, had worshipped them in preference to Jehovah: but these youths were brought into the situation against their will, and in their own minds intended no disrespect to the God of heaven. Were they to act as their own priests and people had done, they would doubtless be highly criminal; but could there then be any great harm in merely bowing their heads, as an act of obedience to their prince? Moreover, when every governor in the empire complied with the edict, why should *they* refuse; more especially since their refusal would subject them to the most cruel death, and rob them of all opportunity of benefiting their respective provinces in future?

They who know how the mind and conscience are apt to be biassed by such reasonings as these, will see, that they must of necessity present a very formidable obstacle to the preservation of integrity under such circumstances.]

But they manfully withstood the royal edict—

[They would not for a moment confer with flesh and blood. No regard to their own ease or safety, no, nor to their eventual usefulness in the world, could induce them to swerve from the plain path of duty. They were offered by the king to reconsider their determination: but their minds were made up, rather to suffer any thing, than to sin against their God. The king had exultingly said, "Who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hand?" But they told him, that their God was able, yea, moreover, that he *would* deliver them out of his hand: but that, whether he would or not, they were fixed in their purpose, never to violate their conscience in bowing down to this golden idol[a].

In the midst of all this firmness, we observe not one indecorous expression; no invectives, no complaints, but simply a declaration of their affiance in God, and of their determination never to sin against him.]

How God appreciated their fidelity, we may judge from,

[a] Dan. iii. 16—18.

II. Their recompence—

The judgment threatened was, that they should be cast into a burning fiery furnace: and the command was instantly given, that it should be executed upon them. But behold how God interposed for them!

1. Whilst it was executing—

[The mightiest men in all the army were selected to execute this judgment, and to cast the offenders into the furnace, now heated seven times more than usual for their reception. The youths were bound in their clothes, that nothing belonging to them might be preserved; and they were cast into the furnace, according to the king's commandment. But, behold! the flames burst forth, and consumed every one of the executioners. This, taken in connexion with the mercy vouchsafed to these faithful youths, marked indisputably the indignation of God against the persecutors, and his approbation of those who had braved death for his sake.

Had the Hebrews died, this destruction of the soldiers would have appeared an accident: but as God appeared, during the execution, to punish his enemies, so he appeared still more visibly in behalf of his friends.]

2. After it was executed—

[The youths fell down bound into the midst of the fire: but the fire had no power to hurt them. It burned the bands by which they were tied, so that, being loosed, they could walk about; but it could not so much as singe a hair of their heads, or incommode them in the least: they could breathe, and walk, and converse as easily as in the open air. Behold too, now "one like unto the Son of God," "an angel," (who, I doubt not, was "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, who had often assumed the form of an angel before,) came into the furnace, and walked with them. This Nebuchadnezzar and his courtiers saw, and were beyond measure astonished at it. And how different now were the feelings of the oppressed and their oppressors! The oppressed had such communion with their Lord as they had never enjoyed before, such as was a foretaste of heaven itself: but their oppressors were filled with shame and confusion of face.

Still further did God appear for his servants,]

3. After it was reversed—

[The king himself, who had sent them into the furnace, came to call them thence; and was constrained, in the presence of all his people, to commend their constancy, and to acknowledge the supreme dominion and power of the God of Israel. On examination of the persons of these youths, it was found,

that not so much as the smell of fire had passed on them. The fire that had consumed their bands, and destroyed their persecutors, had had no power at all over them; so that the king, who had just before persecuted unto death the adherents of Jehovah, now forbade, under the severest penalties, that a single word should be spoken against him.

What a triumph was here; and how gloriously attested! and what a report must now be carried into all the provinces of the empire, by those who had been summoned to attend the ceremony!

But further, these very Hebrews were not only restored to their respective governments, but were promoted to yet higher honours, as a recompence of their fidelity to God. And how they have since been rewarded in a better world, no tongue can express, no human imagination can conceive.]

Amongst the numerous and important REFLECTIONS which this subject suggests, consider,

1. What a mercy it is that we enjoy civil and religious liberty!

[We have no power over us to make such cruel edicts: we are not subject to the decrees of a capricious tyrant: we all can worship God according to our conscience, without restraint. There are, it is true, some small sacrifices made by those who choose to dissent from the established mode of worship; but they are small indeed, and required only with a view to the welfare of the State: they are such as no man who is of a spiritual and heavenly mind feels in the least burthensome.[b] In fact, there is no sacrifice at all, except of a negative kind: all are at liberty to serve God in their own way: the infidel, the Socinian, and the idolatrous Papist, are as free to follow the dictates of their conscience, as the servant and worshipper of our Incarnate God. Let us be thankful for this inestimable privilege. It is not universally so even in what is called the Christian world: there is yet in existence the Popish Inquisition, which is little else than a repetition of Nebuchadnezzar's edict; and which shews us, how necessary those very tests are, to which we have before alluded: for, were the Papists once to regain the ascendant in this country, we should yet again be subjected to all the bloody edicts of former days. O let us bless our God, that the rights of conscience are respected amongst us; and that, in relation to the object or manner of our worship, we are left to stand or fall to our own Master!]

2. What a mercy it is, if we are under the influence of divine grace—

[The whole mass of the Babylonish courtiers, being under

[b] These are now put aside by the repeal of the Test Act in 1828.

no divine influence, complied at once with the order that was issued. So it is with men amongst ourselves. Whatever has the sanction of the great, whether it be good or bad, is followed; and no one dares to stem the torrent of iniquity which overflows the land. But men who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, will "not be conformed to this present evil world:" on the contrary, "they are transformed in the renewing of their minds, and they prove in their conduct what is the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God." What the principle is by which they are actuated, may be seen in the history before us: "By faith it was, that these pious youths were enabled to "quench the violence of fire[c]." And if faith was so powerful under that dispensation, when the object of faith was so indistinctly and partially revealed, what shall it not effect, now that the Sun of Righteousness is shining in its meridian splendour, and the full "glory of God is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ?" Seek then to have this grace formed in your hearts: it is the root from whence all other graces proceed: it is faith that "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world." Live in the exercise of this grace, and all the persuasions or terrors of the world will lose their force.]

3. What a mercy it is to have God for our God!

[If once we possess this blessing, we need never fear what either men or devils can do against us. If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, we need not be concerned about it; for our God will come and walk with us in the fire, and make the wrath of our enemies the occasions of richer communications of his love. He has said, "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour[d]." "If our afflictions for his sake abound, our consolations through him shall much more abound:" and in due season he will bring us forth "out of the furnace, purified as gold." But oh! what a furnace awaits our impenitent persecutors! Who can conceive what "a lake that is which burneth with fire and brimstone," into which all the ungodly shall be cast; and what it will be to "dwell with everlasting burnings?" But for the faithful servants of Jehovah there is reserved "an eternal weight of glory proportioned to the light and momentary afflictions" which they here endured. Fear not then, any of you, to give yourselves up to God, or to encounter the wrath of man for his sake; for "them that honour him, he will honour." Only "be faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life."]

[c] Heb. xi. 33, 34. [d] Isai. xliii. 2, 3.

OUTLINE NO. 1125

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM VERIFIED AND IMPROVED.

Dan. iv. 34—37. *And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me: and I blessed the Most High; and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and, for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom; and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

A MORE remarkable history than this is not found in the annals of the world. Never was such a transition ever heard of, from such an elevation to a state of such extraordinary degradation, as that which is recorded in this chapter. The account is written by Nebuchadnezzar himself; and, doubtless by divine direction, it was incorporated with the writings of Daniel, and made a part of the inspired volume. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch then living in the world: he had subjugated many countries to his yoke; and he ruled over them with despotic sway. But on account of his excessive pride, God determined to humble him, and to make him an example to all future ages. Previously however to the execution of the judgment which he had decreed to inflict upon him, it pleased God to reveal to him, in a dream or vision, the judgment that should be executed. The vision was of a large and fruitful tree cut down; but the stump thereof was left in the ground: that stump however being intended to represent a man, who should be left exposed, like the beasts of the earth, to all varieties of weather, for

the space of seven years, when he should again be restored to his former state of magnificence and power. The Chaldean magicians being unable to interpret this dream, Daniel was sent for; and he interpreted it to the king, in all its parts. The import of it was, that the king was to be reduced to the state of a beast for seven years; and then, being brought to a just knowledge of the one true God, he was to be restored with augmented power and splendour to his throne. Whatever impression was made by the dream, and the interpretation of it, at the time, it soon wore off; and the haughty monarch swelled with pride as much as ever. At the end of twelve months, when walking in his palace and surveying the extent and grandeur of the city Babylon, he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty [a]?" And instantly, while the words were yet in his mouth, the wrath of God fell upon him, and he was reduced to the state of a beast, according to the vision that he had before seen. At the end of seven years the vision was yet further verified, in his restoration: and, in the words which we have read, we see the improvement which he made of the dispensation.

I. He acknowledges God as the Sovereign Disposer of all events—

[He had throughout all his former life left out of his contemplation the thoughts of an over-ruling Providence, and had ascribed all his victories to his own wisdom and prowess. If he had given any honour to another, it was to his idol, Bel. But now he saw, that Jehovah was the God of all the earth: that, however men might appear to effect great changes upon earth, they were in reality "nothing;" they were mere instruments in God's hands; the axe, or saw, with which HE executed his own designs [b]. This was clearly proved to him in the dispensation that had taken place; for, both in the judgment that he had suffered, and in the mercy he had experienced, God alone had wrought; "nor could any stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

[a] ver. 29, 30. [b] Isai. x. 15.

Now it would be well if all the professed worshippers of Jehovah acknowledged his uncontrollable sovereignty, and his universal agency, in like manner. But we, almost like the heathen themselves, are ready to ascribe every thing, whether great or small, to the wisdom and power of man. We lose sight of the first great cause, and fix our minds only on the second causes; and rather than speak of Jehovah as determining events, we will ascribe them to luck, or chance, or accident; and will thus run into atheism itself, rather than give the glory to Him to whom it is due. But let it be remembered, that there is not any thing in the universe which is not done by the express permission of God, and in accordance with his eternal counsels. Men indeed are free agents in all that they do; but still they "do only what God's hand and counsel have determined before to be done[c]:" not the falling of a sparrow takes place but "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This, whilst it does not in the least diminish the responsibility of men as moral agents[d], tends greatly to compose the mind under all the variety of dispensations that succeed each other; and to impress us with the idea, that whatever may be designed or done by men, God will "get himself honour," as he did on Pharaoh, and will eventually be glorified.]

II. He adores God for his dispensations towards himself—

[These had been beyond measure humiliating: yet he speaks of them in the beginning of this chapter with wonder and admiration: "I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the High God hath wrought toward me: how great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders[e]!" So also at the close of the chapter; "I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment[f]." Here he shews indeed that he was restored, not only to the possession of his throne, but to the best possible use of his faculties. The end of the dispensation was now completely answered. In truth, painful as the dispensation was, it was richly compensated, yea, infinitely overbalanced, by the effect it produced. No suffering can be accounted great, that is over-ruled for such good to the soul. To bless and adore God for our afflictions is one of the highest exercises of faith and love. Who does not admire Job, when, under the pressure of his accumulated calamities, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord?" This is to be done, not merely when, as in Nebuchadnezzar's case, we see the termi-

[c] Acts iv. 28. [d] Acts ii. 23. [e] Dan. iv. 2 3. [f] The text.

nation of them; but in the very midst of them all, while they are yet lying heavy upon us, and we see no way for our escape: then, I say, we should give glory unto our God, convinced that "He doeth all things well," and saying, with Hezekiah, "Good is the word of the Lord concerning me." To kiss the rod in this manner, "O! how lovely a spirit does it manifest!" How much better is it than murmuring, and complaining, and fretting under our troubles "like a wild bull in a net!" Let us imitate Nebuchadnezzar then, in this respect; and however afflictive the dispensation with which we are visited may be, let us say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."]

III. He warns others to avoid that sin which brought this calamity upon him—

[He had "walked in pride," and been abased for it below the meanest of the children of men. Secure as he had fancied himself from any calamity, God had inflicted in a moment a punishment, which might well deter all who heard of it from the commission of a similar offence. God is never at a loss for means to accomplish his righteous will: in the judgment inflicted on this haughty monarch, he has sufficiently shewn, that He is both able and determined to "abase all who walk in pride."

Now this consideration is of infinite importance, not to kings only, but to all the human race. Pride is natural to man: there is not a more powerful principle in our fallen nature than pride. The ungodly world are full of it. There is not any distinction, natural or acquired, which is not made an occasion of self-preference and self-complacency. If a man be born of high parentage, or have acquired rank or fortune by his own exertions, how will he be puffed up with his honours, and almost conceive himself to be made of a finer clay than his less-distinguished neighbour! 'My might and my wisdom have procured me all these things:' and on the same endowments they rest for a continued enjoyment of them. Thus "they sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag." Nor is this confined to the ungodly world: there are amongst those who profess godliness, many, who are as full of pride and conceit as those who are altogether ignorant of religion: the object in which they pride themselves is changed; but the principle is the same as ever. Some, like the Pharisee in the Gospel, "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others:" they say in their hearts, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; I am holier than thou." Of these says God, "They are a smoke in my nose[s]." Others, like Diotrephes,

[s] Isai. lxv. 5.

"love to have the pre-eminence;" and are never so happy as when they are setting forth their gifts, and passing judgment upon all that they see and hear. Self-sufficiency and self-conceit, self-seeking, and self-applause, are their characteristic features; and so far from adorning the Gospel as they would be thought to do, they actually make it stink in the nostrils of all who have judgment to discriminate between good and evil. Not a few of such "novices," it is to be feared, "being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil." Even truly good men are by no means so holy, but that they are in continual danger of being drawn into the indulgence of this evil principle. Hezekiah, even after his most extraordinary deliverances from enemies without, and illness within, so far forgot himself as to be lifted up with pride; and thereby provoked God to withdraw from his descendants the mercies that had been vouchsafed to him. And Paul himself was visited with a thorn in his flesh, to keep him low, "lest he should be exalted above measure[h]."

Be it known then to all, that they need to watch and pray against this malignant evil; for God will most abase all in whom it is found. Man cannot abase them: to do this is a work far above the power of any created being[i]: but God is able to do it; and he will do it. He is at no loss for means whereby to effect it[k]. Some, like Manasseh, he will take among the thorns: others, like Peter, he will leave to fall, and to disgrace their holy profession: and others, like Pharaoh, or Herod, he will plunge into the bottomless abyss of hell. "Whereinsoever they deal proudly, he will shew himself above them." Let us never then forget, that "the proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord:" that "whilst he gives grace to the humble, he will resist *them*:" and whilst he filleth the hungry with good things, he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts."]

We EXHORT all, then,

1. To search their hearts, in reference to this sin—

[Men who are under the influence of this sin, always find means to hide it from their own eyes. But it is to no purpose to deceive ourselves: God will not be imposed upon by specious names: he sees the evil, wherever it exists; and he hates it with a perfect hatred. Let us then endeavour to find out even the most hidden workings of this abominable evil, and implore help from God to mortify and subdue it.]

[h] *Twice* mentioned, 2 Cor. xii. 7.
[i] Job xl. 11, 12.
[k] 1 Cor. xi. 30.

2. To be thankful for that fidelity that strives to put them on their guard against it—

[Nebuchadnezzar, though he did not reform his life, was not angry with Daniel for interpreting to him faithfully the vision he had seen. This is not always the case, especially when the sin of pride is pointed out: we are then in danger of being accounted "enemies for telling men the truth." But "let our counsel be acceptable unto you." We are constrained to "speak God's word faithfully," even if we were speaking to the greatest monarchs upon earth. Let none then, of whatever rank or class, be offended. Indeed, to take offence at a faithful ministration of the word, would prove the very point which it was a man's object to deny, namely, that he was under the dominion of pride. The humble will be thankful for every hint that can be afforded them for the discovery of their most secret sins, because they will be led thereby to a deeper humiliation before God, and to a more simple affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.]

3. To humble themselves for it as Nebuchadnezzar did—

[Nebuchadnezzar not only wrote this whole account, but circulated it throughout the whole extent of his dominions. He thought he could never take shame enough to himself for all his former pride! What a glorious evidence was this of the transforming efficacy of Divine grace! It is no easy matter for any man to acknowledge and confess his pride: but to confess it openly, to take shame to himself for it publicly before all, this is a work of grace indeed! and it is the true and proper operation of grace upon the soul. We do not mean that it is necessary to publish our sins to all the world; but it is necessary to confess our faults unto those who have been more particularly affected by them. At all events, we must make confession before our God; for on that depends our present and everlasting acceptance with him: it is impossible, "if we harden ourselves against him, to prosper:" yea, "we shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." "Whoso exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."]

OUTLINE NO. 1126

BELSHAZZAR WARNED OF HIS IMPENDING RUIN.

Dan. v. 5, 6. *In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.*

IN former days, God was pleased to reveal his mind and will to men by dreams, and visions, and signs of different kinds; and this he did, not to his friends only, but also to his enemies. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed his purposes towards the world at large, in the successive establishment and ruin of four mighty empires, and of the final erection of the Messiah's kingdom, which should stand for ever. His purposes also towards this monarch in particular he was pleased to make known through the same medium of communication. In like manner, to the impious Belshazzar he here in a miraculous manner foretold the impending destinies of himself and of his falling empire. The effect of this revelation upon the mind of Belshazzar is described in the words which we have just read; and it will give occasion to many useful reflections, whilst we consider,

I. His overwhelming fears—

[That the sight of a hand-writing upon the wall of his room should surprise him, we may well expect. But why should it create in him such terror as is described in our text? What though he did not understand the writing? he need not on that account to be dismayed, if he had no inward reason to interpret the sign itself as auguring ill of him. But conscience, which had long been silenced by him, now lifted up its voice, and spoke to him in the language of keen remonstrance, and of dire foreboding: and this it was that made "his loins to shake, and his knees to smite one against the other."

Now this is a striking and instructive incident. We may, by carelessness and dissipation, drown for a season the voice of conscience; (unhappily for them, many succeed in this too well!) but sooner or later it will speak, and *that* too in such an

authoritative tone as will make the stoutest sinner tremble. Every one, whether willingly or not, must listen to it at last: and the longer our attention to it is delayed, the more poignant and terrible will its reproaches be. Behold the convictions of the converts on the day of Pentecost, or the desponding and self-destroying attitude of the jailor! Yet these were the kindlier offices of conscience for their good[a]. In many who continue to withstand its dictates, it stings, it rankles, it corrodes, it fills with gloom and melancholy, destroying all their peace, and leaving them nothing but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them." And oh! with what horrors does it fill them at the instant of their departure from the body, and will fill them in the day when they shall be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ! What "fearfulness will then surprise the hypocrites, when they see nothing before them but dwelling with devouring fire and in everlasting burnings[b]!" How will they then "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of that Lamb" of God, whom here they have neglected and despised! Brethren, listen to the voice of this faithful monitor: let not its slightest whispers be unheeded by you: cherish it; consult it on all occasions; labour to the uttermost to "keep it pure; attend to it, and it will prove your kindest friend: neglect it, and it will be to all eternity your bitterest enemy.]

Consequent on these terrors were,

II. His anxious inquiries—

["He cried aloud to bring in all the magicians," that he might inquire of them the import of what was written: and when they were unable to give a satisfactory reply, he was induced to send for Daniel, who on former occasions had expounded the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, but had since been neglected by the weak ungrateful prince who now sat upon the Chaldean throne: now was he glad to learn, even from him, a just interpretation of the words before him.

Here again then we see what sinners will be driven to, when Conscience summons them to its bar, and constrains them to call their former ways to remembrance. Then they will be glad to be instructed in the written word of God: yea, they will request instruction even from a neglected and despised Daniel, in whose judgment and fidelity they can trust, when they have seen, that those on whom they before relied were "physicians of no value." But let not these inquiries be delayed. There is a hand-writing against us all; a writing so plain and intelligible, that "he who runs may read it." It

[a] Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 26—30. [b] Isai. xxxiii. 14.

requires no Daniel, no person of extraordinary wisdom, to expound it. We may see in the sacred volume, which lies open before our eyes, "the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." You need not go to men to interpret this to you: go to God; and he will expound it to you, and by his Spirit will "give you an understanding to understand it." But it is not a sentence of condemnation only that is written there: no; blessed be God! there are many glorious sentences which proclaim pardon and peace through the atoning blood of Christ — — — Read these; meditate on these: and your fears shall speedily be dispelled, and your sorrows be turned into joy. Mark the answers given to those whose terrors we have before spoken of, and the effect of those answers on their souls; and then you will see what you may assuredly expect as the result of your inquiries, if only they be made in sincerity and truth[c].]

The instruction given him was however unavailing: it had no effect on,

III. His confirmed obduracy—

[He listened not only to the instructions, but also to the reproofs of Daniel, who set before him the guilt he had contracted, by his misimprovement of those judgments which had been inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar for his pride; as also by his utter neglect of Jehovah, "in whose hand his life was;" and particularly in so heinously insulting God, as to take the sacred vessels of the sanctuary and profane them in his drunken revels, and make them an occasion of exalting his gods of wood and stone above him. Having set before him these grounds of God's displeasure, Daniel proceeded to explain the writing, and to tell him from God, that his life and kingdom were just ready to be delivered over to his enemies. All this he heard without offence; and he even gave orders, that the promised rewards should instantly be conferred on this faithful servant. But we hear not one word of humiliation on account of all his wickedness: he does not, like Ahab, humble himself in sackcloth and ashes[d]; he does not, like the Ninevites, proclaim a fast; he does not even, like Pharaoh, say, I have sinned; nor does he even, like Simon Magus, desire Daniel's intercession, that these judgments might not fall upon him[e]. He seems altogether insensible, given over to a reprobate mind and an obdurate heart.

And do we not often see a similar result from all the most faithful expositions of God's word? A momentary fear perhaps may be excited, even to terror; but no solid improvement

[c] Acts ii. 37, 38, 46, 47. and xvi. 26—30, 34.
[d] 1 Kings xxi. 27. [e] Acts viii. 24.

follows it; no godly sorrow is produced in the soul; no humiliation before God; no cries for mercy; no departure from iniquity. But, if we thus "harden ourselves against God, can we prosper?" No: "he that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without a remedy."]

In reading this account, we cannot but OBSERVE,

1. The vanity of all earthly enjoyments—

[What can we conceive more gratifying to flesh and blood, than to be entertaining, as Belshazzar did, such multitudes of his nobles, together with all his wives and concubines? Yet, behold, how in an instant all his pleasure vanished, and was turned into insupportable agony of mind! Nor is such a change uncommon: many in the midst of the most licentious scenes have been struck with horror, and made to anticipate their final doom: even a thought passing through the mind has been sufficient to cast a damp over the spirits, and to rob the soul of all its gaiety. What folly then to seek our happiness in things which are so unsatisfactory at best, and which may so speedily become an occasion of our more aggravated woe! Let us remember, that all which the world can afford is "vanity and vexation of spirit." As for "laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, it may be asked, What doeth it?" Yea, even in "laughter, the soul is often sorrowful; and the end of all such mirth is heaviness."]

2. The comfort of a good conscience—

[Daniel was not alarmed, notwithstanding his life was in jeopardy, as well as the life of all who dwelt in Babylon. But Daniel enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience, and therefore had confidence towards God. He knew that the enemy could only kill the body; and that the death of the body would translate his soul into the more immediate presence of his God. Thus Paul, when ready to be offered up a sacrifice, contemplated his departure with joy, assured, that the Lord, the righteous Judge, had prepared for him a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory. And Peter also, when on the very eve of expected martyrdom, and chained to two soldiers, was sleeping as sweetly, as if he had known that God had decreed to liberate him from his prison. Such are the effects of peace with God, and peace in our own conscience. Let us but maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and man," and nothing shall have power to disturb our rest. Assured that "nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," we shall smile at all the storms that encompass us around, and "commit ourselves with confidence into the hands of a faithful Creator."]

3. The blessedness of an interest in Christ—

[Whatever "hand-writing there is against us" in the Scriptures of truth, Christ has "blotted it out, and taken it out of the way, nailing it, as a cancelled bond, unto his cross[f]." Search the sacred volume from one end to the other, and not one word will be found menacing to a believing penitent. The very moment we believe in Christ, all our iniquities, of whatever kind, are blotted out as a morning cloud, and shall never more be remembered against us. Is there then any one amongst us that "trembles at God's word?" let him know, that the more he trembles, the less reason he has to tremble; since God looks upon him with complacency[g], and engages "in no wise to cast him out." Suppose that such an one beheld at this moment written on the wall before him, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN;" and that we were authorized to expound it to him, "Thy days are numbered; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting; and all that thou hast shall now be divided by thy surviving relatives, thy soul being summoned into the presence of its God;" even were this so, he need not fear, because Christ, being apprehended by faith, shall be put into the scale, and make it preponderate in his favour. We do not mean by this, that Christ and his merits are to be added to something of our own; (for He alone must be put into the scale against our sins;) but this we mean; that if there were the sins of the whole world lying on the soul of a single individual, the blood of Christ, applied by faith, should cleanse him from it, and the righteousness of Christ be a sufficient plea for his acceptance with God. Seek then, Beloved, to be united unto Christ by faith; and then, instead of trembling at his approach, you shall "rejoice before him at his coming."]

[f] Col. ii. 14. [g] Isai. lxvi. 2.

OUTLINE NO. 1127

IMPENITENCE REPROVED.

Dan. v. 22. *And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this.*

AMONGST the endowments of a pious minister, two of the most important are, disinterestedness and fidelity. A man who is "looking to his own gain," or is afraid to "declare the whole counsel of God," is unworthy of the sacred office: nor can he hope to

be either profitable to man, or accepted of God. The example of the Prophet Daniel is worthy of universal imitation. He, having been sent for by king Belshazzar to interpret a writing which God had caused to be inscribed upon the walls of the room where the impious monarch was feasting, declined with scorn all the proffered rewards; and reproved, to his very face, the sovereign, whom no other person in the empire would have dared to offend: "Thy gifts be to thyself," says he; "and give thy rewards to another." 'God has here written thy doom, because of thine impiety. He has borne with thee long, and given thee singular advantages for repentance, if thou hadst had a heart to improve them: he has made known to thee all his dispensations towards thy father, Nebuchadnezzar:' "but thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this."

The reproof here given to Belshazzar is not a whit less applicable to ourselves. Permit me, then, to stand to you in the place of Daniel, and to shew you,

I. What advantages we have enjoyed for the humiliation of our souls—

It was certainly a great advantage to Belshazzar, that he had seen God's dealings with his father, (his grandfather,) both in the judgments inflicted on him, and in the mercies vouchsafed unto him. God had in these dispensations clearly marked his indignation against sin, and his readiness to shew mercy to returning penitents. The judgment inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest monarch in the universe, was the depriving him of his reason; and causing him, for the space of seven years, to resemble a beast, and to be treated as a beast; being turned out to eat grass like an ox, and to be exposed, like any common beast, to all the changes and inclemencies of the weather, without shelter, and without a friend to compassionate his forlorn condition. Having, however, by this humiliating dispensation, effected his gracious purpose towards him, God restored him to soundness of mind

again, and to the exercise of his regal functions; yea, and brought him, also, to the possession of real piety, and ultimately to the enjoyment of a far nobler kingdom.

And has he not given to us the same advantage? Yes, and one far greater: for he has made known to us,

1. His indignation against sin; not in one instance only, but in all ages—

[We may go back to the very first introduction of sin into the world; and there we shall see the indignation of God against it, written in the most tremendous colours. Not only was our first parent banished from Paradise; but a sentence of death was pronounced against him; and the whole earth, and all his posterity, were cursed for his sake. Hell, indeed, had been previously created, as a receptacle for the fallen angels: but it was henceforth to be peopled with millions of the human race, who, having received from Adam a corrupt nature, would follow his bad example, and perish in their sins.

As we descend further in the history of the world, we see again the displeasure of God against sin, as manifested at the Deluge; by which judgment every creature upon the face of the whole earth perished, except the few which were admitted into Noah's ark.

Nor was his abhorrence of sin less strongly marked by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and all the cities of the plain, by fire from heaven. In this terrible judgment were involved the infant and the suckling, no less than the most daring offender in the land. Surely, after contemplating such events as these, we cannot doubt but that sin must, in the Divine mind, be an object of the deepest abhorrence.

But we need not go back to distant ages. We need only look around us, and within us, and we shall behold the same awful truth exhibited to our view on every side. Whence is it that storms and tempests desolate the earth, and plagues of every kind are inflicted on the human race? Whence is it that pains, and sorrows, and death assault, not the aged sinner only, but the new-born innocent? Whence is it that there is not a man upon earth, the godly alone excepted, that possesses peace in his soul, in the prospect of death and judgment? How comes it that all are "like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt?" There may, it is true, be found, in sad abundance, men as thoughtless as the beasts: but, of any thing like solid peace, in the contemplation of eternity, there is not to be found one

atom upon the face of the globe, except in those whose iniquities have been purged in the blood of our Incarnate God. We need only consult our own experience, and we must bear testimony to this distressing fact. And what does all this declare? It declares that sin, in whomsoever it exists, is an object of God's abhorrence, and has already stamped upon it the most unquestionable tokens of his displeasure.]

2. His mercy to repenting sinners—

[Here also we may go back to the period, when, unsolicited and unsought, God revealed a Saviour to offending man, and promised that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." What a demonstration was this of mercy struggling, as it were, for vent in the Divine bosom; and exulting, I had almost said, in the discovery of an object needing it, and of means whereby it might be exercised towards him! See the myriads to whom this Saviour was revealed in types and shadows, previous to his arrival. See the work of redemption, as carried on, to its completion, throughout the whole process of the Saviour's incarnation, life and death, and resurrection and ascension; and his full investiture with all power, to accomplish in us what he had already in his own person prepared for us. See the out-pouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; whereby thousands, as far from God as ever Nebuchadnezzar was, were brought to God, and made partakers of God's kingdom and glory. Do not all these things speak to us as loudly as Nebuchadnezzar's conversion spoke to his son Belshazzar?

But of this, also, we have strong intimations, in what we see around us, and in what we feel within our own bosoms. We find, even amongst the most savage barbarians, one general sentiment—that the Being to whom they are responsible will shew mercy to those who, in a becoming manner, implore it at his hands. Amongst ourselves, there is universally prevalent a hope, that, on the repentance of a sinner, God will have mercy on him. But for this thought, the most careless sinner would give himself up to utter despair. In what way mercy shall be exercised towards him, he knows not: but of the readiness of God to shew mercy, he has no doubt. And of this persuasion all of us are conscious: yea, so strongly is it impressed on all our minds, that it is the one source of all the comfort we enjoy.

If, then, we admit, as we must, that Belshazzar's advantages were great, much more are those with which we have been favoured.]

But we have reason to be ashamed, when we reflect,

II. How little improvement we have made of them—

What effect Belshazzar's knowledge ought to have produced upon him is here plainly declared. It should have led him to humble his soul before God. But it had been unproductive of any good: "he had not humbled his heart, though he knew all this." The revels, in which he was indulging at this moment, shewed that he was as much under the influence of pride, dissipation, and impiety, as if no such warning had been ever given him. And what, I would ask, is the state of our hearts before God?

Are we not addicted to the same evils as he?

[There may not be in us the same bold defiance of God as in him; but there is practically the same pride of heart which exalts itself against God, the same surrender of ourselves to the cares and pleasures of life, and the same actual preference of created confidences before Him who is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Psalmist's description of the wicked too justly represents our state: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts: his ways are always grievous: thy judgments are far above, out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them[a]." Here is the same principle of pride as that by which Belshazzar was actuated. Here is God altogether banished from our thoughts, as much as from his; and utter contempt poured upon his authority and on his every word, whether of judgment or of mercy. Look around, and see if this be not the state of all around us. If the luxurious feasting of Belshazzar be unattainable by us, still it is that which is regarded as the very summit of happiness; and which is mimicked by persons, according to their ability, in every rank of life. From what we know of God's displeasure against such carnal proceedings, it might be supposed that they should long since have been banished from the world: but the world is as full of them as ever, and the heart of sinful man as much addicted to them as ever.]

Have we "humbled our hearts," any more than he?

[One might expect, from all that we have read of God's dealings with the world, that we should all be like the Ninevites, humbling ourselves before God in sackcloth and ashes. But where do we see any thing of humiliation and contrition?

[a] Ps. x. 4, 5.

Where do we hear persons bewailing their past iniquities, and crying mightily unto God for mercy? Say, is this common? Say, is it not uncommon? Is it not *very* rare? If you hear of two or three awakened to a sense of their undone condition, you are ready to congratulate the minister and the Church of God on an event so truly wonderful, and so replete with mercy; a sure proof, that the instances are very few, and that the knowledge of the generality is awfully unproductive.]

Is not our sin then, in this point of view, greatly aggravated?

[Daniel spoke of Belshazzar's knowledge as an aggravation of his guilt: "Thou hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this." And is not *our* knowledge also a fearful aggravation of *our* guilt? Our blessed Lord said of the Jews, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin[b]." And, in like manner, I may say to you, that had you been less instructed in the mind of God, you would have had less to answer for, on account of your departures from it. This is placed in a very striking point of view by the Prophet Jeremiah. He speaks of the ten tribes of Israel as having abandoned themselves to idolatry, and as having been discarded of God on account of their wickedness: yet, when the other two tribes saw this, so far from improving it for their own spiritual good, they "turned not to the Lord with their whole heart, but feignedly." Upon which, the Lord himself said concerning them, "The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah[c]:" that is, great as Israel's guilt is, it is not equal to that of Judah; because Judah has had an advantage not possessed by Israel: Judah has seen the judgments inflicted upon Israel, and yet has gone on impenitent: and therefore his guilt is great in proportion to the advantages which he has neglected to improve. And to the same effect our blessed Lord also has told us, that "the servant who knew not his lord's will, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but the servant who knew his lord's will, and yet violated it, shall be beaten with many stripes[d]."]

That I may still adhere to the character of my text, let me ADDRESS you, finally, in a few words,

1. Of warning—

[I would not unduly magnify any advantages which have been enjoyed by you: but I may with truth say, that, accord-

[b] John xv. 22. [c] Jer. iii. 6—11. [d] Luke xii. 47, 48.

ing to the ability which God has given me, I have "ministered unto you faithfully the Gospel of Christ," "not keeping back any one thing that would have been profitable unto you." You therefore have much to answer for. And the words which have been spoken to you, "if they be not unto you a savour of life unto life, will be unto you a savour of death unto death." Yes, much as I have desired to save your souls, I shall be "a swift witness against you in the day of judgment," if you do not truly turn to God, and devote yourselves unfeignedly to his service. I pray you let not our meeting at the judgment-seat of Christ be so fraught with sorrow to our souls; but now make a suitable improvement of what ye hear, that I may have you as "my joy, and crown of rejoicing, in that day."]

2. Of advice—

[Let the dealings of God with mankind be treasured up in your minds. They are designed to teach you what you yourselves may expect at his hands. You may see in his judgments, what the impenitent shall endure; and you may see in his mercies what the penitent shall enjoy. Belshazzar himself may be a lesson to you, if you will not attend to other and more encouraging instructions. He was a powerful monarch; yet his greatness could not screen him from the wrath of an avenging God. "That very night was king Belshazzar slain." Had he humbled himself at that moment, who can tell but that he, like his father, might have been spared to be a monument of God's saving grace to all eternity? Delay not ye, my beloved Brethren, to obey the heavenly calling; lest death arrest you also, and it be too late. "To-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts; but now that ye know all this, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and seek for mercy through him, as the propitiation for your sins." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin[e]." But, "if ye know these things, then happy are ye, and happy shall ye be, if ye do them[f]."]

[e] Jam. iv. 17. [f] John xiii. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1128

BELSHAZZAR'S IMPIETY AND OURS COMPARED.

Dan. v. 23. *The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.*

WHEN we look around us, and see what iniquity prevails in the earth, we are ready to imagine that

God does not notice the affairs of men, or take any interest in their conduct. But, when we open the inspired volume, we find that, on many occasions, the sins of men have been so strongly marked in their punishment, as to bear ample testimony to a superintending Providence, and to constrain us to say, "Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth[a]." The judgment inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar so exactly accorded with the prediction which had been uttered respecting it, that no doubt can be entertained of the hand from whence it came. Nor was the hand of God less visible in the punishment of the impious Belshazzar. In the midst of his drunken revels, "there came forth, as it were, the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote on the plaister of the wall where the king was sitting." The words he could not understand: nor could any of his astrologers or soothsayers interpret them. But, on his application to Daniel, the import of them was declared unto him. The prophet first set before him, and reproved, his impiety: and then denounced the impending destruction of himself and his whole empire; which accordingly took place that very night.

The charge which is here exhibited against Belshazzar is more or less applicable to all the children of men, even to ourselves, as well as others; and will give me occasion to shew,

I. How far our conduct has resembled his—

Belshazzar was as dependent upon God as any of his subjects could be—

[He received his breath from God; by whom also "his soul was upheld in life[b]." His times were altogether in God's hands[c]," who could prolong or cut them short, as he saw fit. Nor was Belshazzar ignorant of this. He could not but feel his dependence on a Superior Being: and he had an evidence, in the dispensations with which his father (his grandfather) had been visited, that this Being was God.]

Yet had he not glorified God, in any part of his conduct—

[a] Ps. lviii. 11. [b] Ps. lxvi. 9. [c] Ps. xxxi. 15.

[He had not acknowledged his supremacy, or regarded his authority, or rendered thanks to him for his mercies, or dreaded his displeasure. On the contrary, he had, with daring impiety, profaned the vessels of God's sanctuary, "drinking out of them, together with his wives and concubines; and praising his gods of gold and silver, of brass and iron, of wood and stone[d];" and thus provoking the Most High to jealousy, and setting him at defiance. In this, he not only "had not glorified God," but had greatly and impiously dishonoured him.]

And we, too, like Belshazzar, are dependent on God—

["In him we live and move and have our being[e]." "In his hand," says Job, "is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind[f]:" and, "if he take away our breath, we die, and return again to our dust[g]. So jealous of his own honour is God, in this respect, that he characterizes himself as much by the preservation of all things, as by their first creation: "Thus saith the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein[h]." "He sees our ways, and counts all our steps[i]." Nor does he leave man to walk at large without controul: "I know, O Lord," saith the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps[k]." In a word, it is as true of us, as it was of Belshazzar, that "our breath is in God's hands;" and "his, even under his governance, are all our ways."]

Yet, like him, have we also forgotten to "glorify our God"—

[Though "we have known God, yet have we not glorified him as God[l]." We have not "given him glory by *repentance*" — — — though that would have honoured him in a very especial manner[m]. Nor have we honoured him by the exercise of *faith* — — — though that also would have greatly redounded to his glory[n]. Nor have we endeavoured to honour him in a way of holy *obedience* — — — though our blessed Lord has so expressly told us, that by our fruitfulness in good works "his Father would be glorified[o]." Had we acted, in any respect, as we ought to have done, we should have

[d] ver. 3, 4. [e] Acts xvii. 28. [f] Job xii. 10.
[g] Ps. civ. 29. [h] Isai. xlii. 6. [i] Job xxxi. 4.
[k] Jer. x. 23. [l] Rom. i. 21.
[m] Josh. vii. 19. Jer. xiii. 15, 16. [n] Rom. iv. 20.
[o] John xv. 8.

laboured that "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in us[p]." But, in having altogether neglected this, we are obnoxious to the very same charge as the impious Belshazzar.]

But as our opportunities of instruction have greatly surpassed any that that unhappy monarch ever possessed, I shall go on to shew,

II. How far our guilt has exceeded his—

"To whomsoever God has committed much, of him will much be required:" and our demerits are aggravated in proportion to the advantages which we have enjoyed. As a heavier condemnation was denounced against the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, because of the special mercies which they had abused, so will God regard us as more guilty than Belshazzar himself; because,

1. Our knowledge of him has been more clear—

[It was but little that Belshazzar knew of God. He did know that Jehovah was above all gods, and that he was able either to save or to destroy. He had seen this, in the degradation to which his grandfather had been reduced, and in the mercy that had been vouchsafed unto him[q]: and he knew it, from the testimony which that restored monarch had borne to the honour of Jehovah[r]. But we have a revelation from God himself; a revelation, wherein he has made known to us his nature and perfections, his works and purposes. There is not any thing respecting him which we are concerned to know, which he has not clearly revealed unto us: so that it is not an unknown God that we are called to serve, but one "with whom we may acquaint ourselves, and be at peace[s]." The precise nature of his will, too, he has declared unto us; so that we are informed respecting every thing which he would wish us either to forbear or do. We cannot plead ignorance in any respect: and therefore "knowing, as we have done, our Master's will," we have contracted greater guilt by our disobedience; and deserved a heavier punishment than he ever did, who knew it not[t]."]

2. Our obligations to him are more abundant—

[Belshazzar was indebted to God for all the blessings both of creation and providence: but we are made partakers of the infinitely higher blessings of redemption. O! what

[p] John xvii. 10. 2 Thess. i. 12. [q] ver. 20—22.
[r] Dan. iv. 34—37. [s] Job xxii. 21. [t] Luke xii. 47, 48.

tongue can declare the obligations we owe him for the gift of his only dear Son to die for us, and to redeem us to God by his blood? — — — This as far exceeds all other mercies, as the radiance of the noon-day sun exceeds the glimmering of a twinkling star. By the consideration of this, we should have been impelled to the most strenuous efforts in his service. The surrender of our whole selves to him, in body, soul, and spirit, has been our reasonable service. Yet have we not given to him the glory due unto his name; but have "set up idols in our hearts;" and in the whole course of our lives have "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for evermore[u]." What then do not *we* deserve at his hands? *we*, who "have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace?" If by this we have incurred a far sorer punishment than they did who "despised the law of Moses[x]," much more must our guilt and punishment exceed that of the impious Belshazzar.]

3. Our responsibility to him is more manifest—

[Of a resurrection from the dead, and a future judgment, that unhappy monarch must have had a very indistinct notion. But we are as assured of these things as if they were at this moment exhibited before our eyes. We know that God has appointed a day "wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained," even by the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has raised from the dead. We know that he will then call, not our overt acts only, but "every secret thing, into judgment;" and recompense us "according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil." Hence we have been concerned to take especial care to our ways; and so to order them before him, that we may find acceptance with him in that day. What guilt, then, must attach to *us*, for our neglect of him, and for our numberless violations of his holy laws! What excuse shall *we* have, when we stand at his judgment-seat? Belshazzar, though he can never excuse, may palliate, his guilt, by saying, 'Lord, I knew not what a judgment would await me:' but we must stand self-condemned, as having set at nought our God and Judge, and, in defiance of his justice, have "treasured up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath[y]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are insensible of all the guilt they have contracted—

[The greater part of mankind, though they live altogether as without God in the world, are as unconcerned about

[u] Rom. i. 25. [x] Heb. x. 28, 29. [y] Rom. ii. 5.

their state as if there were no God to call them into judgment ——— But, Brethren, this is a most awful infatuation. You do not wonder that King Belshazzar trembled, so that "the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another, when he saw the hand-writing upon the wall: but do you not wonder at your own insensibility, when ten thousand heavier judgments are written against you in this book? And what is written against *you*, there is no need of a prophet to interpret: it is expressed in terms plain and intelligible to the meanest capacity. Take but that one sentence: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[z]." Will you not tremble at such a word as this? Know ye assuredly, that, whether you will believe it or not, it shall be fulfilled in its season; and that, if it ever be executed upon you, it would have been "better for you that you had never been born." You may possibly be distinguished amongst men for rank and learning: but, if you were as great as ever Belshazzar was, yet should you find no protection from your greatness: for God's declaration is, that "though hand join in hand," and there were a confederacy of the whole world to protect you, "the wicked shall not pass unpunished."]

2. Those who are trembling for fear of the Divine judgments—

[Others may pity you because of the terror that has seized your mind: but I will congratulate you from my inmost soul. Not that terror constitutes repentance: for, in truth, it is no part of true repentance; but it is often introductory to it: and the man that is "pricked to the heart," and led to cry out, "What shall I do?" is "not far from the kingdom of heaven." Only let your sorrow for sin become more ingenuous, so as to feel like those of old: "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God[a];" and you need not fear but that "the hand-writing that is against you shall be blotted out[b]," and "your iniquities also be blotted out as a morning cloud[c]." Hear what God himself has spoken for your encouragement: "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a broken and contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word[d]." Yes, God himself will look upon you with complacency, and "all the angels around his throne rejoice in your behalf." Be of good comfort, then: and look to that Saviour "whose blood will cleanse you from all sin:" and fear not, but that in Him you shall be justified from all the iniquities that you have ever committed[e].]

[z] Ps. ix. 17. [a] Jer. iii. 25. [b] Col. ii. 14.
[c] Isai. xliv. 22. [d] Isai. lxvi. 2. [e] Acts xiii. 39.

OUTLINE NO. 1129

SCRIPTURE BALANCES.

Dan. v. 27. *Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*

THE words before us were uttered in reference to a single individual, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, whose open acts most fully attested the truth of the allegation contained in them. But God discerns the heart, and weighs every man in his unerring balance; and, though he do not now declare the result of his examination, as he then did, by a written testimony that shall be seen of men, he records it in the book of his remembrance, and will make it known, concerning every one of us, in the last day. Now, as upon this testimony our eternal happiness will depend, it becomes us to ascertain beforehand what the state of our souls really is. And this we may do, if we weigh ourselves in the balances to which we have access. Let me then shew you,

I. In what balances we should weigh ourselves—

Certainly we must not take the scales by which the world forms its estimate of men and things. They are so deceitful, that we can never by them attain any just knowledge of ourselves. They are so constructed, that sin, unless it be of a very enormous character, scarcely affects them at all: and virtue, of however low a character it be, produces a vast preponderance in the scale of merit. Those which I would recommend for your use, are,

1. The balance of God's perfect law—

[The law of God requires that we love God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength; and that we love our neighbour, even every child of man, altogether as ourselves. It admits of no departure from this; no, not so much as in thought. Any thing short of the obedience of Christ himself is a violation of it, and renders us obnoxious to its curse.

Now, if we try ourselves by this standard, who amongst us will not be found wanting? or rather I should say, who

amongst us has ever, for one single moment, come up to it? The light of a glow-worm actually approaches nearer to the splendour of the sun in the firmament, than our obedience has done to that which is required of us. To say that "we are found wanting," is to say nothing. Verily, if weighed in this balance, the best man upon the face of the whole earth will be found "lighter than vanity itself." To us it may appear, that in this respect there is at least a great difference between the states of different men: but, if viewed aright, the goodness of any natural man would really be found to weigh as little before God as the dust upon the balance; so grievously wanting are we all, insomuch that "every mouth must be alike stopped, and all the world become guilty before God[a]."]

2. The balance of his blessed Gospel—

[Persons greatly mistake respecting the nature of the Gospel: they suppose it to be a kind of remedial law, lowered to the standard of human infirmity. But this is a fatal error. The Gospel does not dispense with any one duty that was enjoined by the Law, or lower it in any respect. To suppose that it did, would be to imagine that God at first required more of us than was necessary, or that now he requires less than is necessary; or that some change has taken place in the relation that subsists between him and his creatures; so that that which was necessary in the first instance, is now no longer necessary. The Gospel makes no change whatever in the law: but it prescribes duties, of which the law gave no intimation, and could take no cognizance. It prescribes *repentance*. For this the law made no provision: but the Gospel commands "all men everywhere to repent:" its language is, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up[b]." In addition to this, it enjoins *faith;* even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the appointed Saviour of the world. Of this the law spake nothing: it knew not of a Saviour for fallen man: it simply said, "Do this, and live." But the Gospel reveals a Saviour, who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" and preaches through him the forgiveness of sins, assuring us, that "all who believe shall be justified from all things[c]." Once more, the Gospel calls us to obedience; even to such an obedience as a poor fallen sinner, when aided by the Holy Spirit, is able to render. Such obedience as this the law could not accept: but the Gospel declares, that it shall be accepted of God through Jesus Christ[d]. If only we serve

[a] Rom. iii. 19.
[b] Jam. iv. 9, 10.
[c] Acts xiii. 39.
[d] 1 Pet. ii. 5.

God with a willing mind, he will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" but will be "well pleased with our sacrifices," notwithstanding the imperfection of them, and will vouchsafe to confer upon us a recompence of reward[e].

Now, then, let us inquire how far we comply with the gracious terms of the Gospel. What know we of repentance, even of "that broken and contrite heart which God will not despise?" Have we not still found "a heart of stone" within us, even whilst we have desired "an heart of flesh?" — — — And how have we exercised *faith?* Have our souls gone forth to the Saviour, to lay hold on him, and trust in him, and glory in him? Have we not found a most astonishing backwardness towards this holy exercise, insomuch that we seem to have accounted the Gospel a cunningly-devised fable, rather than a divine reality? — — — Then, as to *the surrender of ourselves to God*, how has it been with us? Has there been that entire devotion of our souls to him, which his love and mercy have so justly demanded? Have we not rather been amazed at our own insensibility and ingratitude, so far exceeding all that we could ever have conceived?

If, then, we weigh ourselves in this balance, what shall we find, but sad occasion for grief and shame? — — —]

3. The balance even of our own conscience—

[This, I must confess, is a very inadequate mode of estimating our real character. Conscience is blind. Its views of duty are very imperfect: its observation of our conduct also is extremely partial; and its judgment very erroneous. Yet even in this balance, unduly favourable as it is, we shall be found sadly wanting. We all know that God ought to be loved and served: that the Lord Jesus Christ also ought to be precious to our souls. We know that sin should be mortified; and that holiness of heart and life should be cultivated. We know, that, as immortal beings, we should rise superior to the things of time and sense, and seek chiefly the happiness and glory of eternity. Now, then, how far have we corresponded even with our own standard of duty? Are we not sensible that the interests of the soul, and the concerns of eternity, have not been of such paramount value in our estimation, as their real importance has required? Defective as our own standard of duty has been, have we not fallen greatly and shamefully below it? — — —]

Let me. then, proceed to shew you,

II. What lessons we should learn from our defects—

There is no reason for us to despond: on the

[e] Heb. xiii. 15, 16

contrary, the more sensible we are of our defects, the more hopeful is our state before God. Let us then search out our defects to the uttermost; and then learn from them,

1. To be thankful for the Gospel—

[O! what glad tidings does the Gospel proclaim! Salvation! Salvation for sinners, even the chief! Salvation for those who have broken the law! yes, and have despised the Gospel also! and have lived hitherto only for themselves!—What thanks can we render to God, that we are permitted to hear this joyful sound, ere the curses of the broken law come down upon us, and we are shut up in that place of torment, where the voice of mercy never sounds, nor one ray of hope can ever enter! Verily, Brethren, if you will not now bless your God, "the very stones will cry out against you." What, if king Belshazzar could have a proclamation of mercy to his soul, what feelings would it excite in him? But it is observable, that no call to repentance was given to him; for his day of grace was past. This, however, is not your state: to you the Saviour says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!" "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden! and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Rejoice then, and leap for joy; for in Christ you have your every defect cancelled, and your every want supplied.]

2. To walk humbly before God—

[Be it so, that your iniquities are pardoned, and your sins are covered:" still, how can you do otherwise than lothe and abhor yourselves, when you contemplate your daily walk before God? What might not be expected of one who has been redeemed from death by the blood of God's only dear Son? What admiration, and love, and gratitude would you suppose must fill the soul of one who has been bought with such a price, and, from a child of Satan, been made a child of God, from an heir of wrath, an heir of everlasting glory? You would naturally suppose that he would not have so much as a thought but how to praise and glorify his Benefactor. But, alas! not even the wonders of redeeming love can produce upon us all the effect that might be wished. We still are in a great measure carnal, looking too much to the things which are visible and temporal, and too little to the things which are invisible and eternal. In truth, our very best services furnish us with but too just occasion for penitence; our very tears needing to be washed in the blood of Christ, and our repentances to be repented of. Let this lesson then be learned; To walk softly before God, in the remembrance of your sins; and, when you have done all that is commanded,

still to say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that only which it was our duty to do."]

3. To be preparing daily for the scrutiny that awaits you at the last-day—

[God will come shortly to judge the world; and will call every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil. Then will innumerable defects, which here you overlooked, be brought to light; and every counsel of the heart, whether good or evil, be made manifest. Should you not, then, be preparing for that day? Should you not get every evil of your heart mortified, and every good thing matured within you? Belshazzar, when he received his warning, had but a few hours to live: for that very night was his soul required of him. And may it not be so with you also? And if it should, in what a pitiable state will you be, as unprepared for your great account! Yet, go you must, and be weighed also in the balance of God's sanctuary; and, if found wanting, like light or reprobate silver, be cast away. Think, I pray you, of the representations given of that period by our blessed Lord: some, as wheat, will be treasured up in the granary of heaven; but others, as chaff, be cast into the fire of hell, even the fire that never shall be quenched. "The net, at present, drags to land both good fish and refuse: but then the good will be gathered into vessels, and the bad be cast away." Well, thanks be to God! there is yet time to prepare for that day; and time to have every defect of your souls supplied. The Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to accomplish in you his good work: and if you truly and unfeignedly commit yourselves to him, he will "perfect in you the work he has begun," and "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."]

OUTLINE NO. 1130

BELSHAZZAR'S DEATH.

Dan. v. 30. *In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.*

"KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." We speak of things as fortuitous and contingent, because we see not the hand by which they are directed; but, in reality, there is nothing contingent, not even the falling of a sparrow: "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Sometimes it has pleased God to make known, beforehand, events, which depended entirely upon the

free will of man; while at the same time they were as infallibly foreseen by him as if man had been a mere machine, without the smallest exercise of choice or inclination. Such were the events which facilitated or attended the destruction of the Babylonish empire. It was optional with Belshazzar whether he would make a feast for his lords, and drink to excess: and it was optional with Cyrus what moment he should seize for making his attack upon the city: but all was foretold by God, with a minuteness and precision which proclaim at once the omniscience of the Deity, and the dependence of all things upon his sovereign will[a]. The event before us had long before been proclaimed by the voice of inspiration: and it will be profitable for us to consider,

I. The time of Belshazzar's death—

In the words, "*that night*," there is an emphasis which must not be overlooked. It was the night,

1. Of his feasting—

[He had "made a feast for a thousand of his lords." We mean not to condemn all feasts: for our blessed Lord himself repeatedly vouchsafed to be present at a feast. But the generality of "banquetings," and "revellings, and *such like*," are among those works of the flesh, "which they who do, shall not inherit the kingdom of God[b]." Of this kind was Belshazzar's feast; at which he gave himself up to mirth, and banished all thoughts of death from his mind.

What an awful thing to be taken at such a moment! Yet how many are there, who, if not slain like him, yet are called away from the midst of the cares or pleasures of this life as unprepared as he! It was so at the time of the Deluge: it will be so at the end of the world: and it is so yet daily and hourly[c]. "The foolish virgins" greatly out-number those who are wise; and have their oil to seek when the Bridegroom's arrival is announced. "They are saying, Peace, peace; till sudden destruction cometh upon them as a thief in the night, or as travail on a woman with child[d]." The Lord grant it may never be so with us!]

2. Of his impiety—

[Feasting and impiety are not unfrequently associated. The generality of men seem to think that they cannot enjoy

[a] Jer. li. 11, 39, 57.
[b] Gal. v. 21.
[c] Matt. xxiv. 37—39.
[d] 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

any comfort in social converse, unless they give way to excess, and banish decency and religion from their presence. Belshazzar could not be content with the pleasure which this feast afforded, but he must openly pour contempt on God, and set *him* at defiance. Accordingly, he ordered the sacred vessels, which his grandfather had taken from the temple at Jerusalem, to be brought forth for the use of himself and his wives and concubines; and then celebrated his gods as superior to Jehovah, over whom (as it should seem) they had triumphed. This completed the measure of his iniquities, and drew down upon him "the vengeance of the Lord, *the vengeance of his temple*[e]." Perhaps we may think the crime and the punishment uncommon: but neither the one nor the other is at all uncommon. What are the songs that are usually sung at feasts, but songs in honour of Bacchus and Venus, the heathen patrons of riot and debauchery? What are the toasts or sentiments, in commendation of which the wine is poured out and drunk? what, but a tissue of lewdness and profaneness? And how often do they who engage in such scenes, come to an untimely end! One falls from his horse; another is overturned in a carriage; another run over by a cart; another is drowned; another is killed in an affray. *We call these things accidents:* but if an inspired prophet were sent to declare the truth, we should find them "*the vengeance of the Lord*, the vengeance of his temple."

And may not we look back to some day, or some night, when God might have cut us off as it were, to advantage, if not in a state of riot and intoxication, yet in some other state equally displeasing to him? O let us call to mind those seasons; and adore his name, that "*in that night*" we were not summoned, with all our iniquities upon us, to give account of ourselves at his judgment-seat!]

3. Of his warning—

[While Belshazzar was indulging in his impious revels, he saw a hand writing upon the wall of the room wherein he sat. Terrified beyond measure at so strange a sight, he called for all his magicians and astrologers to read and explain the words. None of them being able to explain the writing, Daniel was sent for: and he, by Divine inspiration, declared the sentence which God had thus visibly proclaimed. On any other occasion, if we may judge from the neglect into which Daniel had fallen, Belshazzar would have fiercely resented the faithfulness with which this prophet of the Lord had denounced his doom: but his terror had softened him for a moment; yet not so softened him as to produce any genuine repentance in his heart. He ordered the promised reward to be given to Daniel; but we

[e] Note [a].

do not find that he humbled himself before God, or uttered one prayer for mercy. Scarcely was the warning explained to him, but it was executed on him, and on all his dissolute companions. Yes; "*in that night* was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain." As his royalty did not save him, so neither did his terror obtain for him one moment's respite. He heard, he trembled, he died. He had seen (as Daniel told him) the judgments that had been executed on Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather; and yet had not profited by that warning, or humbled himself before the God of heaven: now therefore the warning and the judgment came together: nor was any further space given him for repentance.

How differently has God acted hitherto towards *us!* Many are the warnings which we have slighted; and yet, behold, we live! ——— But how soon his patience may come to an end, and a termination be put to our day of grace, who can tell? ———]

Such was the season when this unhappy monarch was called into the presence of his Judge. Let us next consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Surely we may learn from this,

1. Not to provoke the Lord to jealousy—

[It matters not whether, with Belshazzar, we "praise gods of wood and stone," or whether we "set up idols in our hearts:" in either case, God is dethroned; and "other lords besides him have dominion over us." And shall we think lightly of our guilt, while in such a state as this? or shall we imagine that God regards it with indifference? No: "he is a jealous God: his very name is Jealous[f]:" and "his glory will he not give," or allow to be given "to another." Look then within your own bosoms, ye who are so addicted to the pursuits of this life as scarcely to have any time or inclination for reading the Scriptures and for secret prayer; ye whose feelings are quickly roused when your honour or your interest are at stake, and yet are unconcerned about the honour of God or the interests of your souls; look, I say, within, and see whether God has not reason to be jealous of you; and whether he might not justly destroy you instantly with fire, as he did Nadab and Abihu; or cause the earth to swallow you up quick, as he did to Korah and his rebellious associates? Do not imagine that you are innocent, because you do not follow the *practices* of Belshazzar: see whether you be not living in his *spirit;* and whether you are not despising God in your heart, as much as

[f] Exod. xxxiv. 14.

he did in his actions; and idolizing the world in your heart, as much as he did his fictitious deities in his drunken carousals? And know, that though your idolatry is less gross than his, it involves you in deeper guilt, in proportion as the meridian light of the Gospel transcends the darkness of Heathen superstition.]

2. Not to despise the warnings you receive—

[You have not a hand-writing visibly on the wall: but have you not other warnings, equally legible, on every side? How many are cut off around you, some old, some young, and some in the prime of life! How many sudden deaths take place, or, if not sudden in respect of time, yet unexpected by the persons themselves[ε]! Are the disorders which you see or feel, no warnings? But you have a hand-writing, yea, the hand-writing of God himself; you may see it in the Scriptures of truth: there you may see written, as with a sun-beam, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN:" to *you* it speaks: *your* days are numbered, and nearly finished: *you* are weighed in a balance, and found wanting: and all hope of enjoying the kingdom of heaven will be quickly taken from you, if you do not turn unto God with your whole hearts. God says to you, "My son, give me thine heart:" any thing short of this will be to no purpose. O that you would now "open unto Him that knocketh at the door of your hearts;" and that "the long-suffering of God might now at last lead you to repentance!"]

3. Not to delay the great work you have to do—

[Whilst you are living at your ease, and putting the thoughts of death far from you, God may be saying, "Thou fool, *this night* shall thy soul be required of thee." And O, how terrible would this be to the generality! To some indeed sudden death would be sudden glory: but to others how different! Herod made a feast; and, in compliance with his daughter's request, gave her John Baptist's head in a charger: yes, *that night* was John the Baptist slain. But how different was *that night* to John the Baptist and Belshazzar! The one went from a prison to a crown; the other from a palace to a lake of fire. Inquire, I pray you, how death would find you, if it should come *this night*: and if you are unprepared to meet it, O delay not one hour; give not sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, till you have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Converted you *must* be; or you can never

ε If this be preached as a *New-Year's* Discourse, the last year may be represented as *dead*, or as cut off from our short span of life, which therefore is proportionably contracted.

enter into the kingdom of heaven." Your "conscience must be sprinkled with the atoning blood of Jesus," or your sins will infallibly plunge you into everlasting perdition. Seize then the fleeting hour. Adore your God that you have not been taken away, as thousands of your fellow-creatures have been, with all your sins upon you: and "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your heart;" lest like them you perish in impenitence and unbelief.]

OUTLINE NO. 1131

CHARACTER OF DANIEL.

Dan. vi. 5. *Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.*

AMONGST the numberless things which Solomon denounces as "vanity and vexation of spirit," is this, that "for every right work a man is envied of his neighbour[a]." No consideration, either of the intrinsic excellency of virtue, or of the benefits resulting from it to the world, will abate the malignant workings of an envious mind. For many years had Daniel, as a minister of state, conferred great blessings on the Babylonish empire[b]. And now, after the conquest of Babylon, Darius, the Medo-Persian monarch, from a conviction of his pre-eminent attainments, had placed him next to himself in power and authority in his empire also. And such had been the wisdom and integrity of Daniel in the discharge of his high duties, that the persons most capable of discovering any fault in his administration, and most intent on making such a discovery, if any could be found, were incapable of alleging any one thing to his disadvantage. But were they grateful to him for his services? No: they were envious of his talents, his virtues, and his honours, and laboured with all their might to destroy him. "Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom: but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error

[a] Eccl. iv. 4. [b] Dan. ii. 48, 49.

or fault found in him[c]." This they were constrained to acknowledge, at the very time that they conspired to take away his life. "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Here they not only acknowledge the astonishing excellence of his character, but they actually found upon it their hope of prevailing against him; since it was only by placing in direct opposition to each other the commands of God and the commands of man, that they could involve him in any thing which should furnish them with an occasion of complaint against him.

As for their envious malignity, I shall wave all further notice of it. It is the character of Daniel on which I would now fix your attention; a character the more remarkable, as being drawn, not by friends, but by foes; and not for the sake of commendation, but for the sake only of finding out the most successful method of directing their efforts for his destruction.

For the establishment of such a character as this, there must have been in Daniel a very rare assemblage of virtues; which, therefore, it will be proper for us distinctly to consider, in order that we may clearly understand the character itself, and be stirred up to seek, each of us for himself, the attainment of it. Let me,

I. Open to you the constituent parts of this character—

Here we behold, in combined and unintermitted exercise,

1. Piety—

[This, beyond a doubt, was at the root of all. And how deeply-rooted it was in him, his enemies themselves proclaimed, when they grounded upon that their hopes of prevailing against him; since, if his piety was not sufficient to bear him up under his present difficulties, their plot, so far at least as a violation of human laws was concerned, would be defeated.

[c] ver. 4.

And it is from this principle alone that any real good can flow. Nothing but piety can produce a perfect uniformity of conduct. The corruptions of human nature are too strong to be overcome by any thing but the grace of God. A man may indeed be a wise and experienced statesman, though he fail in the practice of religion and virtue. But no man can maintain, for a long course of years, and under every possible complication of difficulties, a conduct which shall not be open to some degree of censure, especially from those who "watch and wait for his halting;" unless he be assisted from on high, and be in the habit of walking as in the presence of the omniscient God. To this, then, I would call you in the first instance, since without it all human efforts will be in vain. Let your hearts be right with God. Come to him as sinners, in the name of his dear Son. Obtain from him a sense of acceptance with him, and a confidence in him as your reconciled God and Father. Beg of him to write his law upon your hearts, so that you may have an unerring standard, to which to refer every motion of your minds. Look to him for the assistance of his good Spirit under all difficulties; and make it your constant aim to please him. Then will you have within your own bosoms a compass, by which you may find your path in safety through this trackless wilderness; whilst your eye is directed to his law as your rule, and his glory as your end.]

2. Wisdom—

[In this he must have excelled in a very extraordinary degree; else he never could have conducted himself so unexceptionably as he did, for many years together, in circumstances so intricate and arduous as his. The Queen of Babylon's account of him to King Belshazzar was, "There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and, in the days of thy father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him[d]." And Ezekiel, in the very life-time of Daniel, spake of him as eminently distinguished in this respect[e]. Indeed, this was the chief ground of the preference given to him by the King of Persia above all the native princes: "He was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him[f]."

In *us*, too, should this be found; nor can we without it hope to be held in estimation by any, except a few kind and partial friends. To those who are enemies of religion, we shall only give disgust, if our piety be not under the direction and control of wisdom. It is certain that many well-meaning people give

[d] Dan. v. 10, 11. [e] Ezek. xxviii. 3 [f] ver. 3.

very great offence by their injudicious proceedings; yes, and involve themselves, too, in many troubles, which they might, by a greater exercise of wisdom, have avoided. Our blessed Lord cautions us on this head: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you[g]." There may, indeed, be a carnal wisdom, to whose dictates we ought not to listen; for flesh and blood are but blind counsellors to confer with[h]: but there is a sound wisdom and discretion, which is highly commendable, and greatly conducive to good. Hence St. Paul says, "Walk in wisdom towards them that are without[i]." I cannot but recommend, therefore, to all who are possessed of piety, to take heed how they exercise it; lest, by their weaknesses and follies, they make religion itself to be accounted foolishness, and involve in one common reproach all who profess to serve their God. The resolution of David should be that of every one amongst us: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way[k]."]

3. Consistency—

[It is clear that Daniel attended to all his duties; as well those which concerned his intercourse with men, as those which had a more immediate reference to God. Happy would it be if the same care prevailed amongst the religious professors of our day! But, in too many instances, religious people set the two tables of the law in opposition to each other; as though a fulfilment of the one necessarily precluded an observance of the other. How common is it for young people to set at nought parental authority, under an idea that obedience to God must swallow up every other consideration. It must, doubtless, swallow up all regard for authority that is directly opposed to it; but many concessions may be made, and *should* be made too, in relation to matters which involve in them no *moral* guilt, no direct opposition to a divine command: and where the path of duty is clear, the greatest tenderness should be shewn to the feelings and prejudices of a parent, in the prosecution of it. Filial obedience stands, in God's estimation, second only to that which we owe to him. There is frequently a great fault in servants also, who, from a pretended regard for God, neglect the duties of their station; and, instead of exercising a becoming respect for their masters, are petulant, and impatient of reproof, and ready on every occasion to "answer again[l]." In the conduct of superiors, too, there

[g] Matt. vii. 6. [h] Gal. i. 16. [i] Col. iv. 5. [k] Ps. ci. 2.

[l] Here the case of *Students* was adverted to; and a conscientious observance of academic discipline, together with a diligent prosecution of their academic studies, was strongly enforced.

is often much to blame: for it is but too true, that religious duties, as they are called, often induce a carelessness in those which are personal and domestic. But all this gives just occasion of offence; and must be sedulously avoided by all who would maintain a consistent conduct, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.]

4. Firmness—

[On this the enemies of Daniel especially relied. They gave him credit for piety; and they believed that not even the terror of a den of lions would induce him to violate his conscience, and offend his God. In matters relating to the kingdom they could find no occasion against him: but, in what concerned the law of his God, they assured themselves that they should find the desired ground of accusation against him. In this they judged right. He not only would not withhold from God his accustomed sacrifices of prayer and praise, but he would not even appear to do so. He would not even shut his window; lest he should, though in appearance only, give them a ground of triumph over him. He therefore persisted, as before, to worship God in his accustomed way, and publicly to avow his determined adherence to the dictates of reason and religion.

In this he affords to us an admirable example. We must expect "persecution from men, if we will live godly in Christ Jesus." No piety, no wisdom, no consistency, can disarm prejudice, or suppress the workings of envy. Rather, we must expect opposition in proportion as we make our light to shine before men. No one was ever so blameless as our blessed Lord; yet no one was ever persecuted with such general and unrelenting animosity. But our hearts must be fixed: we must be determined to sacrifice all that we have, not excepting even life itself, rather than dishonour God, or violate his commands. Persons in this respect should know beforehand where to find us, even in the path of duty: nor should the whole earth combined be able to turn us from it. This is the state to which we should all attain; and, under circumstances of whatever kind, we should have that reply upon our lips, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."]

This character approving itself to every considerate mind, let me,

II. Urge you all to the attainment of it—

Let me invite you to consider,

1. How it honours God—

[Truly, such a conduct as Daniel's never was seen on earth, except amongst the servants of Jehovah. Nothing but

God's grace can possibly produce it. But, wherever his grace operates, there, in proportion to the measure of that grace, this character is found. No one can ever "behold such light" as Daniel reflected, but he will be instantly constrained to "glorify our Father which is in heaven." Man could as soon create a world, as form this new creation. Wherever it is found, that acknowledgment must be made: "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God."]

2. How it disarms prejudice—

[A want of piety, or wisdom, or consistency, in a professor of religion, causes "the way of truth to be evil spoken of," and "God himself to be blasphemed." But a pious and consistent conduct wrests from the very enemies of God a confession, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." Hence St. Paul, exhorting Titus to "shew himself in all things a pattern of good works," adds, "that he that is on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you[m]." I well know that no blamelessness of conduct can conciliate the regards of an ungodly man; for, as long as he loves darkness rather than light, he must hate you: but you may at least hope to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men[n]," and to "make those ashamed who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ[o]."]

3. How it tends to the welfare of your own soul—

[Beyond all doubt your everlasting reward will be proportioned to your present attainments. As he that "builds on the good foundation nothing but wood, hay, stubble, will suffer loss, and, if saved at all, be saved only so as by fire[p];" so he that embraces in his mind, and illustrates in his life, the whole circle of his duties to God and man, will have an entrance ministered unto him abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[q]." The more we have improved our talents, the richer will be the recompence of our fidelity. We may not in this world have such an interposition in our behalf as Daniel had in the den of lions; or see, as he did, the vengeance of God executed on our adversaries: but we shall have strength given us to sustain our trials, and a weight of glory awarded to us in proportion to them. Go forward, then, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:" and "hold fast your confidence firm unto the end:" then "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord[r];" for "if you suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together[s]."]

[m] Tit. ii. 7, 8. [n] 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15. [o] 1 Pet. iii. 16.
[p] 1 Cor. iii. 12—15. [q] 2 Pet. i. 5—11. [r] 1 Cor. xv. 58.
[s] Rom. viii. 17.

OUTLINE NO. 1132

DANIEL'S UNDAUNTED PIETY.

Dan. vi. 10. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

SUCH is the hatred which ungodly men bear to real piety, that it is not possible to serve our God aright without incurring their displeasure. Neither eminence in station, nor prudence of conduct, will screen us from the assaults of their envy and malice. If any thing could have secured the favour of mankind, the wise and benevolent deportment of Jesus must have gained him universal approbation. But he was as much distinguished by the virulence of men's hatred, as he was by the unrivalled excellence of his own character.

Of all the persons whose history is recorded in the Old Testament, we know not one who surpassed Daniel in wisdom, in integrity, or in a firm adherence to practical religion. His bitterest enemies, who were very desirous of finding in him some fault or error, were constrained to acknowledge, that they should not be able to attain their wishes, unless they should find it concerning the law of his God. Would one not have thought, that a person who could conduct the affairs of a large empire with such skill, as that no error could be imputed to him; and whose piety was so consistent, that not the smallest flaw could be found in his whole conduct, should be universally beloved? Yet, so far was he from being an object of universal regard, that a conspiracy was formed against him by all the great men of the kingdom, and a law was framed, that rendered it criminal to pray unto his God. By this law he had no alternative, but to violate the law and incur its penalties, or to violate his conscience and offend his God.

Daniel, without hesitation, chose the better part: and, "when he knew that the writing (which doomed

him to the den of lions) was signed," he openly worshipped God, precisely as he had done aforetime.

To encourage all who are oppressed and persecuted, to follow his example, we shall,

I. Make some remarks on his conduct—

[It might be said of Daniel continually, "Behold, he prayeth!" — — — But why, in praying, did he look "towards Jerusalem?" Canaan was the land, Jerusalem the city, and the temple the house, in which God more particularly dwelt. And at the dedication of the temple, Solomon repeatedly entreated that God would hear the supplications of his people which should be offered towards that land, that city, that temple[a]. This had been before practised by David[b], as it was afterwards by Jonah when at the bottom of the sea[c]: and it may be considered as a *typical* ordinance, directing *us* to pray unto God, as our covenant-God in Christ, as dwelling with man, yea, as dwelling in our very nature[d]; even to Him, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[e]."

In this manner he prayed "three times a day." It seems to have been the habit of all pious Jews to observe stated seasons of worship three times a day. David practised it in his day[f]: and in the Apostolic age the practice was continued[g]. One would have thought that a person who had so much secular business upon his hands as Daniel had, should have found it almost impossible to maintain such a practice with any degree of regularity, or indeed with any spirituality of mind: but, if the heart be thoroughly imbued with Divine grace, it will be found neither difficult nor irksome to lift it up to God in prayer, even in the midst of the most urgent business.

Nor was Daniel inattentive to his posture in prayer: "he kneeled upon his knees and prayed." We do not say that this posture is indispensably necessary to the acceptance of our prayers; because we find instances in Scripture of persons standing when they prayed: but it is sanctioned by the example of the most eminent saints[h], and even by our blessed Lord

[a] 1 Kings viii. 29, 30, 35, 38, 42, 44, but especially 46—50, which specifies what was to be done *in a state of captivity*, as Daniel now was.

[b] Ps. v. 7. [c] Jonah ii. 4.

[d] John i. 14. ἐσκήνωσεν suggests the precise idea, which the type was intended to convey.

[e] Col. ii. 9. [f] Ps. lv. 17.

[g] Acts ii. 2, 15. and iii. 1. and x. 9. The *third*, *sixth*, and *ninth* hours answered to *nine*, *twelve*, and *three* with us.

[h] Thus did David; Ps. xcv. 6. Solomon; 2 Chron. vi. 13. Ezra; ix. 5. Stephen; Acts vii. 60. Peter; ix. 40. Paul; xx. 36. a large assembly on the sea shore; xxi. 5.

himself[l]. As for the idle slothful posture of sitting during the time of prayer (as is the habit of too many), we do not hesitate to say, that it is most irreverent, unscriptural, and offensive. But what shall we say to those who defer their prayers till they have lain down in their beds, and then offer some petitions, in the midst of which they fall asleep? Surely it is scarcely needful to tell them what acceptance such services must meet with: they may account it a mercy, if their solemn mockery of God be not visited with some signal judgments: to hope for any favourable answer to such prayers, were folly and impiety. Daniel would not yield to such indolent habits, though he was above ninety years of age; because he knew that the deepest prostration of body should accompany the devotions of the soul, and that nothing but extreme weakness could justify us in dispensing with it.

With all his prayers, Daniel offered also a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: "he prayed and gave thanks." This argued the sincerity of his heart. They can feel but little gratitude to God, who do not acknowledge the mercies they have received, as well as ask for the continuance and increase of them. The direction given us by God himself is, "that in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* we should make our requests known to him[k]:" yea, it is his express will and command that we should abound in thanksgiving as much, and as constantly, as in prayer itself[l].

Perhaps it may surprise us, that Daniel offered these his devotions always "with his windows open." Was this from ostentation? Was Daniel like those Pharisees who "prayed standing in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen and admired of men?" No: Daniel was in a heathen land, where the established religion was idolatry; and where Jehovah was not worshipped or acknowledged. He therefore felt it incumbent on him to let it be universally known, that he was a worshipper of the one true God: he wished to be a witness for God, and against idolatry; and to lead men, by his example, to inquire after the God of the Hebrews, in whom alone they could obtain peace and salvation. And though this habit rendered him singular, and excited the odium of his ungodly neighbours, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," and persevered in the performance of his duty without any regard to the opinions of men.

The most extraordinary thing is, that Daniel persisted in this habit "when he knew that the writing was signed." The writing was the law which had been recently enacted, condemning to the den of lions every person, who, for the space of thirty days, should presume to ask any petition of any God

[l] Luke xxii. 41 [k] Phil. iv. 6. [l] 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

or man, except of the king only. This writing was signed by the king; and the law was thereby rendered (according to the absurd custom of the Medes and Persians) unchangeable. But this could not deter Daniel from serving God, or induce him for one moment to chagne his mode of serving him. He was willing to die for the Lord's sake; and was determined to suffer all the penalties of the law rather than violate his duty to his God.]

But as there are various other modes in which Daniel might have proceeded, we shall consider his conduct more minutely, and,

II. State the reasons of it—

Daniel persisted in this open acknowledgment of Jehovah,

1. From a sense of duty—

[He knew that it was his duty to pray unto his God, and to confess him before men. Had the laws of the realm enjoined nothing contrary to the laws of God, he would have felt it his duty to comply with them: "he would have obeyed every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." But when man took upon him to supersede the laws of God, he felt that he had a paramount obligation to serve the Lord. In this respect he resembled the holy Apostles, when they were forbidden to preach in the name of Christ: they answered the magistrates who laid a similar injunction on them, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen[m]:" "we must obey God rather than men[n]."]

2. From a regard for God's honour—

[We will suppose that Daniel had withdrawn from his place of abode, or shut his window and contented himself with worshipping God in secret; he might still have performed his duty as far as respected the mere act of prayer: but what would have been the consequence with respect to God's honour? Would not the framers of the Law have boasted, that they had triumphed over Jehovah; that they had set up a god superior to him; and that his most devoted servant dared not to confess him? Would they not have said, that the worshippers of Jehovah were as devoid of principle as any other people in the world; for that, with all their professed regard for him, they did not believe him able to rescue or support

[m] Acts iv. 19, 20. [n] Acts v. 28, 29.

them; and that they loved their own safety in preference to their God? No doubt, they would have gloried thus, and have despised both Jehovah and all his servants. But would Daniel give occasion for such profane triumph? He abhorred the thought; and therefore he would not relax, or intermit so much as once, his accustomed mode of worship. Similar to his was the conduct of Nehemiah, when Sanballat and Tobiah wanted to intimidate him, and to lead him into an act which should betray a want of confidence in his God: "Shall such a man as I flee? said he: and who is there, that being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in[o]." Thus, whatever specious arguments might have suggested themselves to him for the preservation of his life, Daniel determined to die rather than dishonour God; being anxious only that "God should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death[p]."]

3. For the encouragement of his own people—

[Suppose that Daniel had not thus openly maintained his steadfastness, what would all the rest of his captive brethren have done? Would not they have caught the infection? would not they have dissembled with him, just as Barnabas and others were led away with Peter's dissimulation[q]? It would have been to little purpose that he prayed in secret, if he had been so shamefully regardless of the influence of his example. On the other hand, by boldly confessing his God before men, and offering himself up as a sacrifice for him, the rest of his nation must be emboldened to maintain a similar fidelity, and to brave all the threatenings of their idolatrous oppressors. This was the effect produced by Paul's submission to bonds and imprisonment for the Gospel's sake: "Many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to preach the word without fear[r]." Daniel, being at the head of the kingdom, knew the vast importance of his example; and therefore on this account, as well as for the foregoing reasons, "would not give place, no, not for an hour[s]:" yea, we doubt not but that in offering himself upon the sacrifice and service of his people's faith, he joyed and rejoiced with them all; and (in his heart) called on them to joy and rejoice with him[t].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who live in the neglect of prayer—

[We see in the example of Daniel how a child of God will act: he will pray with frequency, with fervour, with an especial regard to God as his Covenant-God in Christ Jesus:

[o] Neh. vi. 10, 11. [p] Phil. i. 20. [q] Gal. ii. 12, 13
[r] Phil. i. 14. [s] Gal. ii. 5. [t] Phil. ii. 17, 18

and he will confess his God openly, determining to die for him rather than deny him[u]. Now what resemblance have you to Daniel? He could not be kept from prayer; you cannot be prevailed on to pray: he could not be kept from prayer, though he knew that, for continuing it, he should be cast into the den of lions; and you cannot be prevailed on to pray, though your neglect of it will infallibly bring you into the depths of hell. Not all the terrors of death could induce him to omit so much as one single opportunity of praying; and not all the terrors of damnation can instigate you to pray even once with real fervour and devotion. Only ask yourselves, How often have you prayed like Daniel? how often in the day? in the week? in the year? how often even in your whole life? This question will give you an insight into your state before God. O that it may be the means of bringing you to his footstool, and of forming in you those habits which are altogether necessary to your salvation.]

2. Those who are habituated to serve their God—

[Be not surprised if you are called to suffer for righteousness' sake, "nor think it strange if you be tried with a fiery trial." Should this be the case, we congratulate you upon the honour conferred upon you; and we exhort you to "rejoice and leap for joy; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you[x]." Our Lord's direction is, "Be not afraid of man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

But while we exhort you to "be faithful unto death," and, like Daniel, to withstand all the powers of earth and hell, we would particularly entreat you to imitate his spirit. In the first place, let your enemies "find nothing against you, except concerning the law of God." In the next place, conduct yourselves with meekness under your sufferings. You read not of his exciting clamour and rebellion in the state, but of his submitting patiently to the cruelty of his oppressors. We mean not to condemn such an opposition to tyranny, as the law itself admits; but such as is unconstitutional, turbulent, and factious: and we cannot but recommend a cheerful submission to persecution, as, on the whole, most profitable to ourselves, and most honourable to our God[y]. Indeed, when suffering for righteousness' sake, we may expect extraordinary interpositions for our deliverance or support, and may hope to win those who have been the authors of all our troubles[z].]

[u] Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13. [x] Matt. v. 11, 12.

[y] 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

[z] See a most encouraging and well-authenticated instance in Benson's Life of Mr. Fletcher, p. 309. first edition.

OUTLINE NO. 1133

THE DECREE OF DARIUS.

Dan. vi. 25—27. *Then King Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed; and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

IT is the prerogative of God, not only to defeat all the designs of men or devils against him, but to advance his own glory by the very means which his enemies use to obstruct it. The wisdom and fidelity of Daniel had secured for him at the court of Persia the same influence as he had been honoured with by the kings of Babylon; but the princes of that empire sought his destruction, and, together with that, the subversion of all the influence of Daniel's God. They devised a plan, in which they too fatally succeeded, to establish a law, by which Daniel must of necessity, if faithful to his God, be condemned. King Darius, when he saw into what a snare he had been drawn, sought to deliver Daniel from the sentence which the law, so inconsiderately enacted, denounced against him: but he could not prevail; and therefore at last consented to the execution of it on his faithful and unoffending servant. Daniel was cast into the den of lions: and with him, the hope of further protection to the Jewish captives must cease. But behold, God, as Darius himself had hoped, interposed for the preservation of Daniel; and thereby shewed to the conviction of Darius, that he was the One omnipotent and only true God. Darius now ordered the very punishment which Daniel's enemies had sought to inflict on him, to be executed on them; and immediately issued throughout the whole extent of his dominions the decree contained in our text.

We propose to consider,

I. His views of Daniel's God—

We are quite surprised that a heathen, who had so impiously exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, should have such just views, as he shews himself to have had, of the God of Israel. In describing Jehovah, he speaks of,

1. His essential perfection—

[Darius had hitherto known only the gods of gold and silver, or of wood and stone, which had no existence till they were formed into an image by the hands of man; and which, when formed, were lifeless and motionless as the materials of which they were made. But of Jehovah he had far different views: he saw him to be the eternal self-existent God, who, whilst he alone had life in himself, was the one only source of life and being to all his creatures. Him too he saw to be an unchangeable God, "steadfast for ever" in all his purposes, and immutable in all his counsels.

This is such a view of God as all of us should have: if we see not his self-sufficiency, we shall never feel persuaded of his all-sufficiency for our help[a]: — — — and if we be not convinced, that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning[b]," we shall never know whence our own stability arises[c], or enjoy the consolation which God himself designs that we should derive from this never-failing source[d] — — —]

2. His universal dominion—

[Here, we apprehend, this heathen monarch did not limit his views to the providential government of Jehovah over all the works of his hands; but that he spoke also of that spiritual kingdom which should be erected by the Messiah, and which was to be both universal in its extent and everlasting in its duration. The dream and vision of Nebuchadnezzar were well known throughout all the Babylonish empire. In this vision the destruction of Babylon was expressly foretold; and, after the establishment and ruin of three successive kingdoms, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman, a fifth kingdom was to arise, namely, that of the Messiah, which should break in pieces all other kingdoms, and stand for ever. The first part of this dream had now recently been fulfilled; and fulfilled by the very person who had been foretold *by name* three hundred years before he was brought into the world; and in the precise manner also that had been circumstantially foretold at the

[a] Isai. xxvi. 4. [b] Jam. i. 17.
[c] Mal. iii. 6. [d] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

same distant period. These prophecies, beyond all doubt, were shewn to Cyrus and Darius, as soon as they became masters of Babylon: and the miracle just wrought by Jehovah in favour of Daniel, brought additional conviction to the mind of Darius, that the Messiah's reign should be such as had been predicted.

This is a glorious view, of which we should never lose sight. It was this which Abraham delighted to contemplate[e], and which has filled the saints of all succeeding ages with unutterable joy. To us, no less than to those of former ages, it yet remains as an object of hope. The predicted kingdom is indeed established; but it is as yet but very limited in its extent: nevertheless we believe that the word of God respecting it shall stand, and that "all the kingdoms of the world shall in due time become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"———]

3. His miracles of love and mercy towards his believing people—

[Here also Darius speaks in general terms: the deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den is considered by him as a single instance only of the innumerable interpositions which God vouchsafes to his people, and of the wonders which he works in their behalf. The whole history of the Jewish people, from their departure out of Egypt to their final dispersion by the Romans, is one continued record of stupendous miracles and gracious deliverances.

True it is, that miracles are ceased: but wonders, if we may so speak, are quite as common as in the days of old. Wherein is the deliverance of a soul from death and hell inferior to the deliverance of the Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace; or the preservation of Daniel in the lions' den, to the preservation of believers from the assaults of that roaring lion that is ever seeking to devour them? This view then of the Deity is still to be ever kept in mind, in order that we may never give way to fear, or doubt a moment but that He who hath hitherto delivered us, will go on to deliver, and will preserve us safely to his heavenly kingdom———]

Such being his views of the Deity, we are no longer surprised at,

II. His decree founded upon them—

An external worship was deemed sufficient for senseless idols; but not so for the God of heaven and earth: the decree before us required much more than that. Let us distinctly notice,

[e] John viii. 56.

1. Its import—

[The terms "fear and tremble" seem to import only a dread of God, as a terrible being whom it was dangerous to provoke: but the meaning of them is widely different from this. Throughout all the New Testament these words express rather a holy reverential regard, blended with love to Him who is the object of it. St. Paul, when at Corinth, was amongst his converts "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling[f];" not surely with a slavish dread of their wrath, but with a holy anxiety to fulfil his ministry to their greatest advantage. He exhorts servants to "obey their masters with fear and trembling[g]," that is, with a tender conscience, and an affectionate regard to their will. He bids us also to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling[h]," that is, with the utmost watchfulness and care. Thus we understand the decree of Darius as enjoining to all his subjects, that they should serve God with a holy and affectionate regard to his revealed will. We conceive that the terms of the decree do in effect enjoin all that worship which is required of us under the Gospel: for David, speaking expressly of the worship to be paid to the Messiah, says, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling[i];" which shews that "fear and trembling," properly understood, does not expel, but only moderates and tempers, our joy. Indeed, "the angel that is represented as carrying the everlasting Gospel throughout all the earth," proclaims it in terms of similar import, "Fear God, and give glory to him[k]." We see then, that the decree did go, in fact, to the abolition of idolatry, and to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout that vast empire: only, not being followed up by similar enactments, and a practical exhibition of its import by those who were at the head of the empire, it fell to the ground; as all precepts must do, if not followed up by constant exertions and corresponding examples. One effect however necessarily followed from it, namely, to procure more favour to the Jews throughout the empire, and ultimately to facilitate the reception of Christianity throughout the world.]

2. The reasonableness of it—

[Who can contemplate the foregoing views of the Deity, and not confess the reasonableness of the decree founded upon them?

Consider *the power and authority* of God; consider him as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; and can a doubt be entertained whether we ought to fear and serve HIM? Consider also *the love and mercy* of God, particularly

[f] 1 Cor. ii. 3. [g] Eph. vi. 5. [h] Phil. ii. 12.
[i] Ps. ii. 11. [k] Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

as manifested in the redemption of men by the blood of his only dear Son, and the blessings vouchsafed to them through his all-sufficient grace; can any one who adverts to this subject question the propriety of surrendering ourselves up, in body soul, and spirit, to his service? — — — It matters not what rank in society we hold, or what office we may fill; the decree is equally applicable to all, and equally reasonable for all: kings and princes are no more exempt from these duties than the meanest of their subjects: as long as subordination to rulers is enjoined, much more must a duteous regard to the God of heaven be held sacred — — — and, as long as gratitude is esteemed a becoming principle in relation to men, so long must its exercise be obligatory on all towards the Redeemer of the world — — —]

BEHOLD then in this decree,

1. The effect which God's mercies should have upon us—

[Darius felt the deliverance of Daniel to be in fact as great a mercy to himself as it was to Daniel: and a sense of this penetrated his soul with a desire to honour that God by whom the mercy had been vouchsafed. This was right. And is it not right that mercies and deliverances should have the same effect on us? Consider what mercies we have received; some public and national, and others private and personal[1] — — — Should no improvement be made of these? Should we not say, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Surely these things, and especially the mercies vouchsafed to our souls — — — are calls from God himself to glorify him with all our faculties and all our powers[m] — — —]

2. What use we should make of our influence—

[To serve God ourselves is right and necessary: but it is far from comprehending the whole of what is required of us in return for the mercies vouchsafed unto us. We all have influence, which it is our bounden duty to exert: if that influence reach only to a very small circle, we should not on that account think ourselves at liberty to leave it unimproved: nor if it extend over a vast empire, should we be backward to encounter the opposition and obloquy which the exercise of it may bring upon us. Whatever it be, whether more or less, we should regard it as a talent to be employed for God. Even a heathen, and he, we fear, not truly converted, felt this obligation: how much more then should we, who profess to

[1] Here any public or private mercies may be glanced at.

[m] The particular objects of the Society may here be stated at large.

embrace the Christian faith, and to enjoy all the blessings of the Gospel salvation! But we greatly mistake, if we imagine that the influence of any amongst us is small: for if we unite our efforts together, and act in concert with each other, we may do far more than Darius could with all his power. Let any one contemplate the *Bible Society*, in which the poor, strange as it may seem, do far more than the rich; and see what wonders are doing by means of it throughout the world——— Let any one contemplate *Mission Societies*, which are in fact forwarding, as it were, the very decree of Darius, and calling on "all people, nations, and languages to fear and tremble before the God of Israel[n]"——— Let us then rise to the occasion: let us unite as one man: let us not merely *issue the decree*, but *do the thing*; providing all the means for it, and carrying into effect the objects we profess to aim at. Thus shall we indeed approve ourselves good and faithful servants to our God, and be rewarded by him according to our improvement of our respective talents———]

[n] ver. 25, 26.

OUTLINE NO. 1134

THE DESTRUCTION OF POPERY.

Dan. vii. 9, 10. *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued, and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.*

WHILE God exercises his sovereignty, he displays also his wisdom, in revealing his mind to man. As we may trace on many occasions a peculiar propriety in the time and manner of making known his will, so we may observe a kind of suitableness in the revelations themselves to those to whom they were made. The succession of four great empires had been made known to Nebuchadnezzar under the figure of a colossal image composed of various metals[a]; and the same is revealed to Daniel by a

[a] Dan. ii. 31—45.

vision of four dreadful beasts: the propriety of these different representations is evident; for the mind of that haughty monarch was engrossed with the love of earthly grandeur; whereas the humbler mind of Daniel would view great conquerors rather in the light of ferocious beasts, eager to gratify their own appetites, though it be by the desolation of the human race. In Daniel's vision also many things were added relative to the church of God, which, though of infinite importance in his eyes, would have been of small moment to the king of Babylon—

If we notice the terms themselves, nothing can be conceived more majestic than this description of God's coming to judgment. First, "the thrones are *set* down[b], and "the Ancient of days," the eternal incomprehensible Jehovah, with Christ as his assessor, takes his seat. The august appearance of the Judge, "clothed in a garment white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool," denotes his unsearchable wisdom that penetrates the deepest secrets, and his unsullied integrity as discoverable in all his decisions. His throne is compared to a triumphal chariot, whose seat and wheels are of fire, and from which issues a stream of fire, to destroy those whom his justice shall condemn. "Myriads of angels minister to him" as the willing executioners of his decrees, and "innumerable multitudes stand before him" to receive their sentence from his mouth. "The judgment being thus set, the books are opened;" as well the book of his remembrance, wherein the actions of all were written, as the book of his law, whereby they are to be judged.

This is a prophecy; in considering which we shall shew,

I. To what it refers—

[*The destruction of Antichrist* is the first event to which this description refers. The prophet directs our attention, not to the general judgment, but to a particular judgment which shall be instituted for the punishment of a blasphemous,

[b] So the words "*cast* down" should rather be rendered,

persecuting, and presumptuous power. Who that power is we cannot reasonably doubt. The little horn spoken of in the context will appear evidently to be the Papal Hierarchy, if we consider how exactly the characters of that antichristian power are described by the prophet. It arose after that the Roman empire had been divided into ten smaller kingdoms: it reduced under its dominion three of those kingdoms[c]: and from the time that it had gained this ascendency, has never ceased to persecute the saints, and to assume to itself the unalienable prerogatives of the most high God[d]. St. Paul's account also of the man of sin corresponds exactly with this, and confirms this application of the prophecy in the strongest manner[e].

The enlargement of Christ's kingdom is another event, to which the judgment before us has respect. The connexion between this and the destruction of popery is very strongly marked by the prophet. Repeatedly in this chapter does he unite two events[f]; teaching us thereby to expect assuredly, that, as they are united in God's purpose, so shall they be also in their accomplishment.

As to the time when these things shall come to pass, we know that it shall be one thousand two hundred and sixty years from the time of Antichrist; but we must wait for the event, before we can positively say from what precise period the numeration of those years must commence. Partial checks has popery already received, as at the Reformation. So was there then a correspondent increase of zeal to spread the knowledge of Christ. But when the time shall arrive, and that idolatrous power shall be destroyed, then shall "the kingdoms of the world speedily become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."]

That we may make a just improvement of this prophecy, let us consider,

II. What should be the state of our minds in reference to it,

1. We should look forward to its accomplishment with holy confidence—

[c] The Exarchate of Ravenna, the kingdom of the Lombards, and the state of Rome.

[d] Who is ignorant of their claims to infallibility, and of power to dispense both pardons and indulgences? Who knows not how they have set up their authority above that of God himself, changed the institutions of his sacramental supper, prohibited to their clergy the very first ordinance of God and nature, and dispensed with every obligation human and divine?

[e] 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4, 8, 9. [f] Dan. vii. 11—14, 26, 27.

[There is a state of mind peculiarly proper for the investigation of unfulfilled prophecy. To treat any part of divine revelation with indifference, as though it were an unprofitable task to search into it, would argue a very criminal disregard of Him from whom that revelation proceeds. On the other hand, to be stirring up ourselves to a state of feverish excitement, as though we could already discern every minute particular which shall take place when the period that has been predicted shall have arrived, is to dive into futurity with an unhallowed boldness, and to pervert the true end of prophecy. Prophecy is not intended to make us prophets, but to shew us, after that the predictions shall have been fulfilled, that the events so predicted were both foreseen and fore-ordained by the Most High God. The true medium is that which the prophets themselves observed: "They searched diligently what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow[g]." The Prophet Daniel, when he understood from books that the time for the delivery of his people from the Babylonish captivity was drawing near, "set himself by prayer and supplication and fasting," to attain a more perfect knowledge of God's purpose respecting it. And the saints who lived near the time of our Lord's advent in the flesh, engaged in constant prayer, "looking for him as the consolation of Israel," and waiting for his promised redemption. Now, if we would attend upon God in such a spirit as this, we should never sustain any injury to our souls from such holy exercises. But, when we so engage in searching into future events as almost to overlook what is past; and so please ourselves with our own fancied discoveries, as to place almost on the back ground all the wonders of redeeming love; we betray a very depraved appetite, and foster both in ourselves and others a spirit the very reverse of humility and love. In relation to future events, we stand in the same predicament with the saints who lived before the coming of our Lord. If we presume to pry into them with unhallowed curiosity, and to dogmatize respecting them as if they were already open to our view, we shall both suffer loss ourselves and inflict an injury on others: but, if we explore them with the modesty that becomes us, we shall find the contemplation of them profitable to our own minds, and the developement of them, so far as they are revealed to us, truly beneficial to the Church of God. Take, for instance, what is spoken in Scripture respecting the destruction of Popery, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom throughout the world, we should be content with asserting only what the Scriptures have asserted,

[g] 1 Pet. i. 11.

and with stating as conjecture whatever has not Divine authority for its support. If we go beyond this, we render the record itself questionable, by adding to it our own conceits, and loading it with circumstances not clearly revealed. It is sufficient for us to know, that both the one event and the other shall assuredly take place, and that when the Lamb has vanquished that idolatrous and bloody power, he will reign over the whole world[h], "there being throughout the whole earth but one Lord, and his name One[i]."]

2. We should look forward to great events to which God's present dispensations are only a prelude—

[The time is surely coming, when the whole world shall be judged, all the wicked being cast down, and all the righteous exalted, in strict accordance with the prophecy before us. For so has St. John informed us: "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away: and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works .... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire[k]." On that occasion will all the pomp described in our text be fully realized: "for the Son of Man will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; and he shall sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats .... And of these, some shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal[l]." To the same effect St. Paul also says, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe[m]." About this event no diversity of sentiment can arise. It is fast approaching to us all: for though the day of the general judgment is distant, the time for our being individually summoned into the Divine presence is near to every one of us. Disease or accident may at any moment carry us to the judgment-seat of Christ, and fix our eternal destinies either in heaven or hell, according as we are prepared or unprepared to

[h] Rev. xvii. 14. [i] Zech. xiv. 9. [k] Rev. xx. 11—15.
[l] Matt. xxv. 31, 32, 46. [m] 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

meet our God. Let us then ask ourselves, What is recorded concerning us in the book of God's remembrance, and what evidence we possess that our names are written in the book of life? When that hour shall arrive, it will be of small moment to us, what judgments have been executed on the Church of Rome, or what blessings have been vouchsafed to God's elect. We are all of us chiefly interested about our own eternal state: and therefore, though I would by no means discourage an inquiry into the general designs of Providence, I would most earnestly entreat every one to look to his own ways, and to judge himself now, that he may not hereafter be judged of the Lord.]

OUTLINE NO. 1135

THE REIGN OF THE SAINTS.

Dan. vii. 18. *The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.*

THE vision of Daniel contained in this chapter accords with that which had before been vouchsafed to Nebuchadnezzar, and interpreted by Daniel himself[a]. To Nebuchadnezzar it had appeared as a great image, the various materials of which denoted four successive kingdoms, which would yield at last to one universal empire established on their ruins. To Daniel it appeared as four wild beasts, which would successively prevail; till at last the kingdom of the Messiah should be erected, and reduce every adverse power to a state of complete subjection. To Nebuchadnezzar, who saw nothing but glory in the rise and fall of empires, the idea of a glorious image was most suited: but to Daniel, who viewed the malignant dispositions which produced such revolutions, and the miseries that were occasioned by them, they were more fitly represented under the notion of wild beasts, tearing and devouring one another. But in the vision of Daniel there were revealed many additional circumstances, which very greatly interested him, and which he earnestly desired to have explained. The last of the four kingdoms was to be

[a] Dan. ii. 31—45.

broken into ten smaller kingdoms, represented by ten horns; amongst which "a little horn, that had eyes, and a mouth speaking very great things," grew up. This little horn (which seems evidently to denote the Papal power) was to make war with the saints; and, after grievously afflicting them for one thousand two hundred and sixty years, to be itself destroyed, and the kingdom to be given to the saints.

On that part of the subject that relates to the little horn, we shall be silent; because the stating of different opinions respecting it would be unprofitable to those who are hungering for the bread of life: but that part which is contained in our text will be edifying to us all: we shall proceed therefore to consider,

I. The event predicted—

The establishment of the Redeemer's empire upon earth is that which is foretold in the preceding verses[b], and which in reality is meant in the passage now before us. But the kingdom is called the kingdom of the saints, because it will be entirely composed of saints, and altogether under their government[c]. That they shall possess it we can have no doubt; and when the time shall arrive, so universal will the reign of piety be, that it will appear as if all the saints who have ever lived upon the earth had risen again, and as if Christ himself had come down again from heaven to reign over them[d]. But respecting the saints there are two things which it will be proper to shew,

1. How they will take possession of the kingdom—

[They will *not* do this *by force*, unless indeed by the holy violence of faith and prayer: in that respect "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:" but in respect of any exertion on their part to usurp dominion, it will not so much as enter into their minds. Divine grace will have taught them to "be subject to the powers that be; and

[b] ver. 13, 14. [c] ver. 22, 27.

[d] Rev. v. 10. and xx. 4. Some contend for a *literal* accomplishment of these predictions: but the view here given of them is greatly to be preferred.

that not only for wrath, but for conscience sake." If they lived even under a Nero, they would, notwithstanding all his cruelty, regard him as God's minister, whom, by any other means than those which the law itself admits, they are bound not to resist[e]. No man can act as becometh a saint, if he be not found amongst those that are "quiet in the land."

It is through the intervention only of God's power that they are exalted to posts of honour, and invested with authority over their fellow-creatures. In the days of old, the enemies of God were overruled to execute his will, in the elevation of a Joseph and a Daniel to the command of mighty empires, and of the Hebrew youths to the government of extensive provinces: but at the time to which our text refers, the subjects, as well as the governors, shall all be converted to the faith of Christ; and kings, no less than others, shall submit to the authority of Christ; yea, "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." There will not need any human efforts to subvert the government of the ungodly: God himself will change, not the persons, but the principles, of those who are in the seat of judgment; and will press into his own service all their faculties and all their powers. Thus without any public commotions will the work be effected: "The stone that will break in pieces all adverse powers will be cut out *without hands;*" and the kingdom will be erected, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."]

2. How they will administer it—

In this they will differ widely from the monarchs of this world: they will consult, not their own will, but the will of their heavenly Father; and seek, not their own glory, but his. Every nation will have a theocracy, such as obtained in the days of Moses, and of the Judges. Men will be invested with authority indeed; but the Lord Jesus Christ will be the one Head over all: his laws will be the ground-work of every law that shall be enacted, and his glory the end of every ordinance that shall be administered. "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers." Judges and magistrates will distribute justice with the utmost possible fidelity, all in their several places "fearing God and working righteousness." All the minor offices in the State shall be executed in like manner with the strictest integrity: "officers of every description will be peace, and exactors righteousness:" "no violence of any kind will be heard[f]" in any of the departments of civil government; nor will any interest be consulted but that of the whole community.]

Such is the event which in God's own time we

[e] Rom. xiii. 1—5. [f] Isai. lx. 17, 18.

assuredly expect: and from the description already given it is easy to anticipate,

II. The advantages that will accrue from it—

Let us notice,

1. Those of a temporal nature—

[The first that occurs to our minds is this, that there will be no more *foreign wars*. The history of the world for four thousand years has been little else than a recital of murderous and desolating wars: but in that day, we are told, that "swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not rise against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." What a blessing this will be, can scarcely be estimated by us, who have for so long a period been exempt from the horrors of war; but in those countries where its desolating progress has been felt, this will appear a blessing of no small moment. As "wars will cease among the nations of the earth," so in the different nations there will be no *domestic feuds*. "Judah will no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah." "The wolf and the lamb shall dwell together" in perfect harmony: the noxious qualities of the human heart shall be universally restrained: love alone will reign in every circle: "they shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, because the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea[g]." We may further add, that in that day there will be no *personal wants*. Now a great portion of the human race are oppressed with want, so as scarcely to know how they shall provide bread for the morrow: but in that day it will be as on the day of Pentecost, not literally indeed, but in effect, all delighting to supply the necessities of their fellow-saints. As in the wilderness "he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack," so in that day will "the abundance of some be a supply for the want of others, that, as far as will conduce to the welfare of the whole, there may be equality[h]."]

2. Those of a spiritual nature—

[Vast will be the increase of *light* in that day: "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Hitherto the greatest part of the world have sat in darkness and the shadow of death: but then "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" and such shall be the fruit of their exertions, that "all men shall be made to know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." The diffusion of Divine knowledge will

[g] Isai. xi. 6—9. [h] 2 Cor. viii. 13—15.

then be a national object: men shall not then be "put into the ministry to supply them with a piece of bread," but "to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers:" and patrons will exercise their power for God, to provide the people with "pastors after God's heart." The people also, whilst flocking to the church "as doves to their windows," will so receive the word, that it will universally "have free course and be glorified among them."

Together with light, there will be among all classes a great augmentation of *peace and joy*. "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory." Nor shall their joy be so variable as at present: "their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light; and the days of their mourning shall be ended[i]." To this happy state of the Church shall the reign of the saints essentially contribute: for the zeal of the pastors, the spirituality of the people, and the more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, will all conspire to "turn the wilderness into a garden, and to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose: yea, it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing[k]."

There will also be a far larger measure of *holiness* pervading the world. The Canaanite will then "be no more in the land." "The people will be all righteous[l]:" and surprising will be the beauty and fertility of every plant which the Lord hath planted[m]. To this also will the reign of the saints greatly contribute. Sin of every kind will be discountenanced, and iniquity, if any still exist, will be constrained to hide its head———]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of being accounted saints—

[This name, which God so highly honours, is with many a term of reproach. But happy are they who are "counted worthy of this shame." The day will ere long arrive, when they shall have far higher honours than man can bestow. We who are now alive may not live to see the day predicted in our text; but, if not, we shall see a happier day, when, "having suffered with Christ, we shall reign, and be glorified together with him." Verily for all the saints there is a kingdom provided; and they who look forward to it shall not be disappointed of their hope[n]———]

[i] Isai. lx. 19, 20.
[k] Isai. xxxv. 1—6, 10.
[l] Isai. lx. 21. and Zech. xiv. 20, 21.
[m] Hos. xiv. 5—7.
[n] 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rev. iii. 21.

2. Let all endeavour to help forward the expected day—

[God will make use of instruments, just as he did in the apostolic age: and we apprehend he is evidently preparing the way for the fuller diffusion of his Gospel by the various efforts which his people are now making in every quarter of the globe. He is causing his word to be translated into the different languages of the world, that all may be able to "read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God." He is sending forth missionaries into different and distant parts; and is uniting myriads of people in the blessed work of instructing the benighted heathens. Let all these works then be dear to you; and help them forward to the utmost of your power: so may we hope that ere long "the crooked places may be made straight, and the rough places plain, and that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

OUTLINE NO. 1136

FASTING AND PRAYER.

Dan. ix. 3. *I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.*

THE season of Lent has been long observed in the Church, as a time for peculiar fasting and prayer. By our Church has the appointment of it been adopted, as well suited to promote the eternal interests of her members. But, in the present day, and amongst Protestants in particular, the subject of fasting is but rarely and lightly touched upon in our public addresses. Yet it ought to be considered: and I will therefore take occasion, at the present time, to state,

I. How far it is our duty to observe seasons of fasting and prayer—

Loaded as the Jewish Law was with burthensome enactments, there was but one fast appointed in the whole Mosaic ritual—

[This was on the great day of annual expiation[a]; and it was the only fast that was fully recognised in the Apostolic age[b].

[a] Lev. xxiii. 27—32. [b] Acts xxvii. 9.

Yet were there many fasts afterwards enjoined on particular occasions. Joshua, when repulsed by the men of Ai[c]; the whole eleven tribes, after their repeated defeats by the tribe of Benjamin[d]; all Israel, when oppressed by the Philistines; and Jehoshaphat, when invaded by the united armies of Moab and Ammon[e]; all had recourse to fasting, as the means of obtaining favour from the Lord, and succour in the hour of their necessity[f]. Nor were these national fasts only observed; but, in private the most eminent saints adopted this measure, for the purpose of deepening their humiliation, and of quickening their devotion[g]. In fact, the case of Esther alone will suffice to shew how important a measure this was esteemed, for the obtaining of relief from God in any great extremity[h].]

Nor, under the Christian dispensation, was there any stated fast appointed by the Lord—

[Our Lord indeed intimated, that there would arise occasions which would call for solemn fasts[i]; and he gave directions for the acceptable observance of them[k]. We find, too, that on some particular occasions, such as the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas to a special work, and the ordaining of elders for the service of their God, fasts were observed in the Christian Church[l].

Hence, then, I should say of such observances, that they are approved of the Lord, rather than absolutely ordained; and proper for seasons of peculiar emergency, rather than fixed to any precise time or measure. St. Paul, who was exposed to far more severe trials than any other of the Apostles, tells us, that he served God "in labours, and watchings, and fastings[m]:" and therefore we cannot doubt the *expediency* of such observances, whilst we admit that they are not imposed on us as rites of *indispensable necessity*. Yet, indeed, considering all that has been said, we think that no person, who truly desires to attain any eminence in the divine life, will judge it either prudent or proper wholly to neglect them.]

Having spoken thus candidly respecting the necessity of such observances, I proceed to shew,

II. What benefit we may hope to derive from them—

Beyond all doubt, such seasons are truly beneficial to the soul—

[*In a man's first entrance on the divine life*, he cannot do better than to address himself to God in fasting and prayer.

[c] Josh. vii. 6. [d] Judg. xx. 26. [e] 1 Sam. vii. 6—8.
[f] 2 Chron. xx. 3. [g] 2 Sam. xii. 16. Ps. cxix. 24. Luke ii. 37
[h] Esth. iv. 16. [i] Luke v. 33—35. [k] Matt. vi. 16—18.
[l] Acts xiii. 2, 3. and xiv. 23. [m] 2 Cor. vi. 4, 5.

At such a time, he has to humble himself for all the sins of his former life, and to implore pardon of God for all the guilt he has ever contracted. And can this be done too solemnly, too earnestly, too devoutly? It was in this way that Cornelius obtained favour of the Lord[n]: and he is a fit example to all who desire to find mercy at the hands of God.

But, *in all his future progress through life*, also, the Christian has need of the same means, in order to the preservation and advancement of his spiritual welfare. Who is not conscious of some particular propensity, of which it may be said, as of the spirit which the Apostles were not able to eject, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting[o]?" In every living man there are corruptions, which may be greatly weakened and subdued by means of setting aside times for fasting and prayer. They who are united together in the bonds of wedlock, are of course exposed to feel the sad effects of human infirmity, each in their partner: and hence St. Paul recommends to married persons a short occasional separation from each other, for the purpose of "giving themselves to fasting and prayer[p]:" nor can we doubt, but that, if that expedient were more frequently resorted to, incomparably greater happiness would be found in wedded life, and a far wider diffusion of blessedness amongst all the successive generations of mankind. In fact, a far higher standard of piety would be established in the world, if, like the holy Apostle, Christians of the present day were "in fastings often[q]." If he, with all his high attainments, "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away[r]," methinks no one of us can presume to think such a discipline either unnecessary for himself, or ineffectual for his good.]

But the whole efficacy of them depends on the manner in which they are observed—

[If men have recourse to fasting, under a superstitious notion that they can thereby expiate their sins or propitiate the Deity, they err most fatally, and rivet on their own souls the guilt of all their sins. In fact, what is this but to punish the body for the sin of the soul, and to substitute their own self-imposed sufferings for the atoning sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ? Yet this error, to a vast extent, obtains in the Church of Rome; which inculcates the observance of fasts and penances, and pilgrimages, as meritorious before God, and as the most effectual means of conciliating the Divine favour. As for ostentation, however it prevailed amongst the Pharisees

[n] Acts x. 30. [o] Matt. xvii. 21. [p] 1 Cor. vii. 5.
[q] 2 Cor. xi. 27. [r] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

of old, or still abounds in the Romish Church, there is little danger of it amongst us Protestants, who have run into a contrary extreme, and despise these observances as much as the Papists idolize and abuse them. Yet, as a ground of confidence before God, we, no less than they, are in danger of founding our hopes upon them. But this error, I again say, will render them, not only not salutary, but absolutely pernicious. Fasting is only a means to an end. We want to have the soul more deeply engaged in prayer, and more fixed in devotedness to God; and fasting greatly contributes to these ends. But if it be made itself a ground of hope before God, God will say to us, as to the hypocrites of old, "When ye did fast, did ye fast unto me, even unto *me?* Was it not to yourselves rather that ye fasted[s]," 'that ye might have in yourselves a ground of self-righteousness and self-complacency, instead of relying solely on the obedience and sufferings of my dear Son?' To have our fasts accepted, they must be accompanied with a determined mortification of all sin, and an unreserved performance of every known duty. "Such is the fast that God chooses;" and such alone will ever bring his blessing on our souls[t]. Any other than this will be despised by him[u]; nor will any other accord with the example set us in my text.]

APPLICATION—

[Let none of you, then, think this an unnecessary labour, or imagine that it will interfere with your other duties in life. Of all the holiest men recorded in the Old Testament, there was not one more eminent than Daniel; nor was there one who had a greater weight of business upon him than he; yet even he found time for solemn fasting and prayer. Let none, therefore, decline this service, either as unprofitable or needless. As for those who have ever set themselves like him to seek the Lord God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, I will ask whether they did not find the exercise truly beneficial to their souls? And, if they have afterwards laid aside that holy service, I will ask them whether they have not suffered loss in their souls? I can have no doubt what must be the testimony of every living man respecting this. To every man, therefore, I commend the practice as most salutary and beneficial: nor have I any doubt but that those who, like Daniel, approach the Deity with fastings and prayer, shall, like him, receive speedy answers to their prayer, and signal manifestations to their souls, that they are "greatly beloved of their God[x].]

[s] Zech. vii. 5, 6.
[t] Isai. lviii. 6—8.
[u] Jer. xiv. 12.
[x] ver. 20—23.

OUTLINE NO. 1137

DANIEL'S CONFESSION.

Dan. ix. 3—7. *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us, confusion of faces, as at this day.*

FROM the earliest period, even from the time that God first had a visible Church in the world, there have been particular seasons set apart for humiliation, and fasting, and prayer. In the Christian Church, the appointment of forty days at this part of the year (Lent) for that purpose is of great antiquity[a]. The two days with which this season commenced were observed with peculiar solemnity: the one (Shrove Tuesday) was spent in recollecting and confessing[b] their sins; the other (Ash Wednesday) in fasting and supplication. That these institutions were carried to a very foolish excess, and that they degenerated into many absurd superstitions, under the reign of Popery, is readily acknowledged: but they were good in their origin; and our Church has wisely retained such a portion of them as might tend to the real edification of her members: and if we were more observant of them than we are, we should find substantial benefit to our souls. But, alas! we have run into an opposite extreme, insomuch that not

[a] The number of days for fasting was not always precisely the same as now: but the appointment itself may be traced almost to the times of the Apostles.

[b] The word "*shrove*" is from the old English word "*shrive*," which signifies, *to confess*.

only the observances are laid aside, but the very intention of them is almost forgotten: and instead of complying with the design which is intimated in the names given to the days, we render them perfectly ridiculous, by substituting a trifling change in our food for the most solemn acts of devotion before God.

Hoping however that on *this* day we are disposed to humble ourselves before God, we shall,

I. Illustrate this confession of Daniel—

The manner in which he made his supplications is deserving of particular attention—

[He "set his face unto the Lord God:" he did not rush into the Divine presence without any previous meditation, but endeavoured to have his mind impressed with reverence and godly fear, that he might "not offer to his God the sacrifice of fools."

He "sought God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." By mortifying the body, he endeavoured to aid the labours of his soul. Both the one and the other had been defiled by sin; and therefore he strove to make them partners in humiliation before God. Nor can we doubt but that the fervour of his prayers was greatly assisted by the bodily privations which God himself has so often prescribed for this very end.]

Nor must we overlook *the remarkable representation which he gave of the Divine character* on this occasion—

[He mentions in very expressive terms both *the majesty* and *the goodness* of God; the one for the abasing, the other for the encouraging, of his soul.

What words can more strongly paint *the majesty* of God? In various other passages, God is called "the great and terrible" God[c]: and well may he be addressed in such terms; for "who knoweth the power of his anger?" Let us only call to mind the judgments he has executed on sinners; on the rebel angels; on the antediluvian world; on Sodom and Gomorrha; on the Egyptian first-born; on Pharaoh and his hosts; yea, on the Jews in Babylon, which was the point referred to in the text; and we shall confess that "God is very greatly to be feared."

[c] Neh. i. 5. and ix. 32. and Deut. vii. 21.

Yet he was not unmindful of the Divine *goodness*. Notwithstanding God is angry with the wicked, he has "made a covenant" with his Son, wherein he engages to "shew mercy unto all who love him and keep his commandments." Now this covenant he has never violated; this mercy he has never refused to one who by faith laid hold on that covenant, and shewed forth his faith by his works. And Daniel mentions this, in his address to God, as the ground on which he presumed to approach him, and ventured to hope for acceptance with him.]

His confession before him is also worthy of notice, as being expressive of the deepest humility and contrition—

[So deeply did he bewail his own sins and the iniquities of his people, that he strove by the most diversified expressions to make known his hatred of them: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened to thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name."

Here he distinctly acknowledges to God *their transgression of his commandments*, and *their contempt of his reproofs*. These were indeed a just ground for his humiliation; since to no other nation had such a revelation of God's will been given, or such messages of mercy sent. Happy was it for him, and happy for the nation, that the reason of their chastisements was thus discovered; and that, by knowing wherein they had erred, they had learned wherein they were to amend their conduct!]

There is yet one thing more on which we must make our remarks, namely, *his justification of God in all his dealings with them*—

[Nothing but equity is ascribed to God; nothing but shame is taken to themselves: "O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee; but unto us confusion of face." He does not utter one word in extenuation of their guilt, or one complaint against the Divine judgments: he declares rather, that, to whatever extremities God might proceed, he could not but be righteous; and that, whatever mercies they might experience at his hands, nothing but the deepest self-abasement could ever become them. Thus he gives the most decisive evidence of true repentance, and exhibits an admirable pattern for penitents in all ages.]

Having briefly illustrated this confession of Daniel, we shall,

II. Found upon it some suitable and appropriate OBSERVATIONS—

1. We have the same sins to confess—

[Without entering into any distinctions founded on the different terms which are here accumulated, let us only take the general division before mentioned, and call to mind *our transgression of God's commandments*, and *our contempt of his reproofs*.

Which of the commandments have we not broken? We may perhaps imagine, that, though we may have violated some, we are guiltless respecting others. But, alas! if we take our Saviour's exposition of them, and remember, that an angry word is murder, and an impure look adultery, we shall find reason to bemoan our transgression of them all — — —

Nor is it any small aggravation of our guilt that we have despised those warnings and invitations which he has sent us in the Gospel. The ministers of Christ have testified against our ways from Sabbath to Sabbath, and from year to year: yet how few have hearkened to their voice!" how few have turned from their evil ways! how few have heartily embraced his salvation, or devoted themselves unfeignedly to his service! Let us in particular enter into our own bosoms, and consider what improvement WE have made of the truths delivered to us — — — If we do this in sincerity, we shall be at no loss for matter of humiliation before God.]

2. We have the same God to go unto—

[We do not like to think of God's *majesty;* but he is, as much as ever, "a great and terrible God:" the Apostle justly observes, "Our God is a consuming fire." Let us not dream of a God *all* mercy: the Deity is just as well as merciful; and it will be found "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" — — —

On the other hand, the *goodness* of God is unalterable. He is still merciful to all who lay hold on his covenant; and will assuredly fulfil to them all the promises of that covenant. Heaven and earth may fail; but not a jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail — — —

Let us entertain just conceptions of the Divine character; and we shall have a frame of mind suited to our condition; we shall be under the joint influence of hope and fear; of hope without presumption, and of fear without despondency.]

3. We ought to approach him in the same manner—

[We should carefully prepare our minds for communion with God. The neglect of this is the reason that we so seldom

obtain real fellowship with him. We should not lay aside, as it is to be feared we do, the duty of fasting: we should set apart seasons for more than ordinary humiliation; and more especially improve those seasons which are set apart by public authority.

We should search out our iniquities with diligence: and, instead of leaning to the side of self-vindication, should learn to justify God and to condemn ourselves. Nor shall we ever have our hearts right with him, till we can say, 'God will be righteous, though he should cast me into hell; and nothing but confusion of face will become me, even though I were as holy as Daniel himself.'

Let us then begin the employment this day, under a full assurance, that "he who thus humbleth himself under the mighty hand of God, shall in due time be lifted up."]

4. If we approach him in the same manner, we shall assuredly obtain the same success—

[That which Daniel desired on this occasion was, to obtain an insight into the prophecy of Jeremiah relative to the return of the Jews from Babylon, and the mystery which was prefigured by it, the redemption of the world by the promised Messiah. And behold, here was the angel Gabriel sent to give him the desired information, and to inform him, that "at the very beginning of his supplication, God, in answer to his prayer, had sent him" this gracious message[d].

Now, if this nation at large engaged in the services of this day with any good measure of that spirit with which we profess to have approached our God, there can be no doubt but that a blessing would be poured out upon the whole land; and that the mercies we more immediately need would be vouchsafed unto us, or the judgments which we deprecated would be averted[e] — — —

But if only in our individual capacity we improved this season aright, I can have no hesitation in saying, that we should have the Scriptures more fully unfolded to us by the Spirit of God; yea, and special manifestations of God's love to us by that same Spirit witnessing to our souls, "Thou art greatly beloved." Did Daniel gain by prayer such discoveries of Christ[f], and shall not *we?* Yes assuredly; and, if we will dedicate this very day truly and diligently to its peculiar and appropriate use, we shall before the close of it add our testimony to that before us, that "God has not said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

[d] ver. 20—23.

[e] This, of course, must be accommodated to existing circumstances

[f] ver. 24—26.

OUTLINE NO. 1138

HUMILIATION EXEMPLIFIED AND ENFORCED.

Dan. ix. 3—10. *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day: to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.*

THE time for the captivity of the Jews in Babylon was fixed in the prophetic writings: yet, through the incredulity of all who had any influence among them, it was not known. Daniel, however, who at an early age had been carried captive, and who believed the word of God, studied the prophecies of Jeremiah, and understood from them, that the time of deliverance was nigh at hand; since about sixty-nine years out of the seventy, which was the appointed duration of their bondage, had now elapsed[a]. Encouraged by this discovery, and well knowing that the deliverance was only to be obtained by prayer[b], he set himself with all humility and earnestness to seek the Lord. To himself, at all events, this solemn

[a] Jer. xxv. 11, 12. and xxix. 10.
[b] Jer. xxix. 12—14. with 1 Kings viii. 46—50.

exercise of fasting and prayer was of great service: for, beyond all doubt, it was the means of strengthening his soul for the trial which he speedily afterwards sustained, when cast into the den of lions[c]. There is reason to suppose, too, that it prevailed in no small degree to bring down upon the whole nation the promised blessing.

The account here given us, will lead me to shew,

I. The concern which he manifested for the welfare of his own brethren—

Though himself placed in a situation of great honour, he was not unmindful of his Jewish brethren. He longed for their deliverance from their sore bondage; and he sought help for them from Him who alone was able to turn the hearts of kings. Let us mark,

1. The way in which he sought the Lord—

[" He set his face unto the Lord his God;" doubtless turning towards Jerusalem, according to the direction given by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. In this we see his *faith* in the Lord Jehovah, whom, by this very act, he acknowledged, in the most appropriate manner, as Israel's God. To him he turned " in fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Though exalted to the highest station in the court of Darius, and though now at an advanced period of life, considerably above eighty years of age, he not only sought the Lord in prayer, but imposed on himself these austerities, for the purpose of deepening his humiliation before God, and of obtaining a nearer access to him in his supplications. In this he shewed the sincerity of his heart, and the ardour of his soul; and has set an example to all future generations, of the way in which God is to be sought in behalf of a suffering people, and of the way in which national blessings are to be obtained.]

2. The views which he had of the Deity whom he addressed—

[He contemplated the Deity in all his diversified perfections, as a God of infinite majesty and holiness, and at the same time of unchanging mercy and truth. " O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love nim, and to them that keep his command-

[c] Compare ver. 1. with Dan. vi. 1, 4, 16.

ments!" God had shewn himself "great and terrible" in the judgments he had executed upon them; and to all who shall continue to offend him he will prove "a consuming fire[d]." Yet "to those who should love him, and obey his commandments," he would shew mercy, according to the full extent of his covenant which he had made with them in Horeb. It must however be remembered, that the attainment of this character was necessary to justify their claim on him for any one of these mercies: nor did he ever venture to implore these blessings for his people on any other condition than that which God had imposed, and which it became his Divine majesty to require.]

3. The particulars of the prayer which he presented before him—

[Here we notice his *humble confession*, and his *penitential acknowledgment*. In his confession, he reiterates the same idea, in a great diversity of terms: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled." He goes on to recapitulate particulars: "We have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land." Now, in this he shewed how deeply he laid to heart the iniquities of the nation. Had his sense of it been light, a single expression of it would have sufficed: but it is of the very nature of deep contrition to abase ourselves, and to feel as if no words could ever express the enormity of our guilt. In like manner, whilst he fully justifies God in all the judgments he had inflicted, he takes to himself all imaginable shame, as the proper portion to every individual of his nation, from the highest to the lowest. And, this also he repeats[e], as from the fullest conviction of his soul.]

4. The grounds on which alone he ventured to hope for mercy—

[It was from God's mercy alone that he could entertain a hope. In himself, or in his people, he could find nothing wherein to ground a plea: but in God he saw every thing that could justify an assurance of acceptance for all who should come to him aright. "To God belonged mercy and forgiveness," as being essential to his nature, and the very delight of his soul[f]. And, though the greatness of their guilt might seem to preclude them from a hope of mercy, and the severity of God's judgments might appear to indicate that he was implacably offended with them, he particularly declares, that on neither of these grounds had they any reason to despond; for

[d] Deut. iv. 24. [e] ver. 7, 8. [f] Mic. vii. 18.

that mercies and forgiveness, to the utmost extent of their necessities, still belonged to him, *notwithstanding they had so grievously rebelled against him.*"]

In all of this we see, with most unquestionable evidence,

II. The concern which we should manifest for our own souls—

For our nation we ought most assuredly to feel as Daniel felt, and to act in their behalf as he acted[g] — — — And now that the time for the restoration and conversion of the Jews is so near approaching, ought not we to make our supplication to God for *them* in the very way that Daniel did? — — — I hesitate not to say, that our obligation to seek their spiritual and eternal welfare is not a whit inferior to that by which Daniel was impelled to seek their temporal deliverance[h].

The salvation of our souls is at all times, and under all circumstances, an object worthy to be sought with our whole hearts. Let me then urge upon you,

1. The study of the Scriptures in reference to the great work of redemption—

[Daniel, though immersed in business of the most important nature, found time, yea, *made* time, for the study of God's blessed word; and by study he ascertained the period fixed for the Jews' deliverance from bondage. And should not *we*, however occupied, find time for the study of the Scriptures, that we may know all that God has spoken respecting that infinitely greater deliverance, the redemption of our souls? The object of his inquiry was nothing in comparison of that to which our attention should be turned. Shall we, then, plead as an excuse, *that we have not time?* Shall any thing under heaven be suffered to stand in competition with that in which all the glory of God is displayed, and on which the everlasting salvation of our souls depends? I say, it is a shame that the sacred volume, which contains all these mysteries, is so neglected by us, or so superficially and negligently

[g] This idea should be opened at some length on a *Fast-day*, in reference to the particular state of the nation at the time.

[h] This, if it were preached *on the subject of the Jews*, must, of course, be greatly amplified; if not, it may be altogether omitted.

perused. And I call on all of you to lay this matter to heart; and now with all diligence to "search the Scriptures," in which ye think ye have, and in which assuredly ye have, eternal life revealed to you.]

2. An application to God for mercy with all humility and earnestness—

[Daniel was considerably above eighty years of age when he arrayed himself "in sackcloth and ashes," and betook himself, in the most solemn manner, to fasting and prayer. Shall *we* then account this service too self-denying for us? Did he mourn so deeply for the sins *of others*, and shall *we* not mourn for *our own?* Shall a short ejaculation be thought sufficient for *us*, when scarcely invention itself could furnish terms sufficient to express his sense of their guilt? Shall we offer excuses for ourselves, when he, the holiest man that day on earth, was filled with shame and confusion of face? Think with yourselves, what would be your feeling, if God now, by revelation, made known to this assembly all that had ever passed in your hearts? Would you not be filled with confusion? Would you not be glad to hide your heads, aye, and to spend the remainder of your days in solitude, unknowing and unknown? Why then do you not abase yourselves before God? He views you, not as we do, but as ye really are: and if your eyes be opened to discern your real character, I hesitate not to say that you will "lothe yourselves," yea, and "abhor yourselves in dust and ashes." Nor will ye account a whole life of prayer and supplication too much to obtain the mercy of your God.]

3. An entire casting of yourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus—

[Remember, that God must be sought as he is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. The temple, towards which Daniel turned his face, was a type of Christ, "in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells," and through whom alone the Father is accessible to sinful man. "There is no way to the Father, but through Christ[i];" "but of those who come to God through him, not one shall ever be cast out[k]."

You must be especially careful to renounce every other plea. If you rely in any measure whatever on your own righteousness, you never can find acceptance with him[l]. If Daniel relied entirely on the mercy of his God, so must you. The Apostle Paul "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God

[i] John xiv. 6. [k] John vi. 37. [l] ver. 18.

by faith in Christ[m]." Be assured that you must do the same: and if you resemble him in this, you shall, like him, experience the mercy of your God abounding towards you, yea, and superabounding in proportion as your iniquities have abounded. In particular, guard against limiting the mercy of your God, or accounting the greatness of your sins any ground for despondency: for "mercy belongs to God, *notwithstanding* you have rebelled against him[n], and *notwithstanding* you have so long slighted the offers of mercy which he has "sent you by his servants the prophets." This is, indeed, a great aggravation of your guilt: but still, in the view of all the guilt you have ever contracted, I declare to you this day, that, provided only you will believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, "though your sins have been as scarlet, or of a crimson dye, they shall become white as wool, and white as the spotless snow."]

[m] Phil. iii. 9. [n] 1 Tim. i. 16. Rom. v. 20, 21.

OUTLINE NO. 1139

THE ANSWER TO DANIEL'S PRAYER.

Dan. ix. 17—23. *O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken, and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.*

AN inquiry into prophecy is highly commendable; and more especially now that so many prophecies

are on the very eve of their accomplishment. But it is not by study alone that we shall be able to attain the true interpretation of the prophetic writings. We must pray to God to reflect the true light upon them, and to enable us by his good Spirit rightly to apprehend them. This was the way which Daniel took, when he saw, by the writings of Jeremiah, that the seventy years of captivity were drawing to a close[a]: he could not tell the precise time from which they should be numbered; and consequently could not ascertain the period for their termination: but he was anxious to know when the happy time was to commence. He set himself therefore to study the prophecies of Jeremiah, and to seek instructions from God in a way of humiliation, and fasting, and prayer[b]. The success which he met with deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it affords an encouragement to all to follow his example. Let us consider,

I. The record here given—

In this are two things to be noticed;

1. The prayer of Daniel—

[To enter into this aright, the whole chapter should be attentively perused. The first thing that strikes us in this prayer is, *his just view of the Deity;* of his *majesty*, as a "great and dreadful" God; his unchanging *faithfulness*, in "keeping covenant and mercy to his loving and obedient people[c];" his *justice*, in all the judgments that he inflicts on the disobedient[d];" his *mercy*, in pardoning those who have rebelled against him[e]; and his *truth*, in executing every word that he has ever spoken[f]. From this comprehensive view of the Divine perfections arose that just mixture of humility and confidence which is visible throughout the whole of his address.

The next thing to be observed in Daniel's prayer is, *his deep humiliation before God.* On the subject of his own and his people's sins, he so accumulates expressions as to shew that he thought he could never sufficiently abase himself before his God[g] — — — In a word, nothing but shame and "confusion of face" seemed to him to be suited to his condition as a sinner; though of all the saints in the Old Testament he seems to have

[a] Jer. xxix. 10. [b] ver. 2, 3. [c] ver. 4. [d] ver. 7.
[e] ver. 9. [f] ver. 11, 12. [g] ver. 5, 6.

been the most perfect; not one thing during the course of a long, and public, and laborious life being laid to his charge, either by God or man.

His earnest pleadings with God are yet further deserving of especial regard. He seems as if he would take no denial, yea, as if his spirit could brook no delay[h]. Every thing that might be supposed to influence the Deity is brought forward as a plea, to incline him to have mercy on his afflicted people: the consideration of God's former mercies to them in Egypt[i]; a regard for his own honour, since they still bare the same relation to him as ever[k]; and a love to the promised Messiah, whose glory would ultimately be promoted by it[l]. All these pleas shew how earnest and importunate he was, even like Jacob when wrestling with the Angel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."]

2. The answer given him—

[How marvellous was the condescension of God, in sending the angel Gabriel to give unto his servant an answer of peace! But here it will be peculiarly profitable to compare the answer with the prayer:—"O Lord, hear! O Lord, defer not!"—'Go Gabriel; fly with all possible expedition: do not so much as look back to behold my glory: mind nothing but your errand: tell him, in answer to what he is saying, "To me belongeth shame and confusion of face," "O Daniel, thou art greatly beloved." In answer to his request, that "I would not defer," tell him that at the very beginning of his supplications the commandment was given thee to go and answer them from me: and, whereas he has only prayed for information respecting the redemption of my people from Babylon, which Jeremiah predicted to be wrought in the space of seventy years from the time of his prophecy; tell him of that infinitely greater redemption which that typifies, and which is now to be accomplished in seventy weeks of years; explain to him every thing relating to the vicarious sufferings of the Messiah, and the righteousness which He will bring in thereby for the deliverance and salvation of a ruined world[m]. And let this answer be to all the future generations of mankind a memorial of my grace, and a pledge of my condescension to all my praying people.']

Instead of dilating much on the circumstances of this instructive history, we have merely glanced at them, that we may more largely dwell upon,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

[h] ver. 19. [i] ver. 15. [k] ver. 19.
[l] ver. 17. [m] ver. 24—27.

Behold then here,

1. The nature of prayer—

[Prayer is an application of the soul to God for some desired blessing. But it will be proper distinctly to notice its constituent parts.

There must be, in the first place, *a just apprehension of the Divine perfections.* If we view not God as a Being of infinite majesty, and holiness and power, we shall not approach him with that reverential fear that becomes us: and if his goodness, and mercy, and truth, and faithfulness be not borne in mind, we shall be destitute of all those encouragements that are necessary for the support of our souls. The greatest of men must never for a moment forget the former, nor the vilest of men the latter. Abraham, Moses, Job, Isaiah, were all abased, as it were, in dust and ashes, by their discoveries of God; whilst, on the other hand, the very murderers of the Lord of Glory had in one moment their terrors dissipated, and their souls revived, by a single glimpse of God, as reconciled to them in Christ Jesus. A partial view of God will lead either to despondency or presumption; but a just view of him will call into exercise all the best feelings of the heart, combining activity with confidence, and fear with love[n]— — —

Next, there must be *a contrite sense of our own extreme unworthiness.* No prayer can come up with acceptance before God, which does not proceed from a broken and contrite spirit, Angels who have never fallen may offer praises without any other kind of humiliation than that which proceeds from a sense of their utter meanness and insignificance; but a sinner, though redeemed, must never forget that he is a sinner, or neglect to blend contrition even with his most exalted services. In heaven itself the redeemed cast their crowns before the Saviour's feet, in acknowledgment that they receive them altogether from him, and that they desire to wear them only for the advancement of his glory[o]— — —

Connected with our contrition there must be *an earnest pleading with God.* This is the very soul of prayer. True it is, that God does not need to be prevailed upon by our importunity, as though he were of his own nature backward to assist us; for to exercise mercy is his delight: but he requires importunity in us, as the means of exciting in our hearts, and of evidencing in our prayers, a deep sense of our need of mercy[p] — — —

[n] Here a distinct view may be taken of all the perfections before mentioned.

[o] Here the nature of real humiliation may be more fully traced, in reference to that of Daniel.

[p] This also may be briefly illustrated.

But that which gives to prayer its chief efficacy is, *a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Our blessed Lord tells us, that "whatever we ask *in his name* we shall receive." It is his mediation alone that procures acceptance for our prayers: and then only do they come up with a sweet odour before God, when they are presented in his censer, and are perfumed with the incense of his prevailing intercession[q].]

2. Its efficacy when duly offered—

[God will not cast out the prayer of faith: but his answers to it shall be *sure, speedy,* and *effectual.* "Never said he to any, Seek ye my face, in vain:" and the accumulation of promises which he has given us on this subject, leaves us no room to doubt, but that he will grant us, in answer to our prayers, such blessings as he knows to be best for us[r]. If he give us not the thing we asked for, he will give us that which on the whole is far better, and which, if we had known what was best for us as he does, we should have asked. The time previous to his answer may appear to our impatient minds long: but his answers shall not be protracted beyond the fittest season. The parable of the unjust judge shews us how the importunate widow prevailed at last: and the instruction which God founds upon it is this: "Shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them *speedily,*" i. e. as speedily as will conduce to their greatest benefit. Moreover, his answers shall be commensurate with all our necessities. However "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it." David says, "I cried to the Lord; and the Lord heard me *at large:*" thus will he hear *us* at large, "supplying all our wants according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," and "giving us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."]

ADDRESS—

[Let every one in his place and station be as Daniel, a man of prayer. Others besides Daniel have had immediate answers to prayer[s]: and God promises that we also shall be answered as speedily as ever Daniel was, if it will really be for our good[t]. If any one be discouraged for want of an answer to his prayers, let him remember that God may have answered them already, though unperceived, and in a way not contemplated by the suppliant himself. An angel is mentioned by the prophet Zechariah as answered, not in the way that he had

[q] Here it may be shewn what attention is paid to this throughout our whole Liturgy.

[r] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [s] Acts x. 30, 31. [t] Isai. lxv. 24.

desired, but "with good and comfortable words[u]." And Paul, when praying for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, had it not removed, but sanctified, and grace given to him to improve it aright[x]. Know then, whether you see it or not, that God both does, and will, answer your petitions. Only let them be humble, and believing, and they shall never go forth in vain.]

[u] Zech. i. 12, 13. [x] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

OUTLINE NO. 1140

THE TIME AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

Dan. ix. 24. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*

IT has pleased God on many occasions to manifest his regard to prayer; and to give such speedy and gracious answers to it as should encourage all his people to pour out their hearts before him. Daniel, having understood by books that the seventy years' captivity in Babylon were drawing to a close, set himself by fasting and prayer to implore mercy for himself and his captive nation: and God instantly sent an angel to testify the acceptance of his prayers, and to reveal to him the period fixed for that far greater deliverance, which should in due time be effected by the Messiah. "Seventy weeks," according to the prophetic language, mean seventy weeks of years, that is, four hundred and ninety years, a day for a year[a]. Commentators are not agreed respecting the precise year from which the numeration of them begins[b]: but, according to any calculation, the

[a] Ezek. iv. 6. There is a remarkable coincidence between the seventy years at the end of which this temporal deliverance was to take place, and the seventy weeks of years when the great Deliverer was to come. That space of time (four hundred and ninety years) includes ten Jubilees; at the last of which, not one nation only, but all the nations of the world should hear the sound of the gospel-trumpet, and be restored to their forfeited inheritance.

[b] The more approved calculations are those which are dated from the seventh, or from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and the latter by lunar years.

Messiah must have long since come into the world; and the Jews are inexcusable in rejecting so decisive a testimony. The *ends of the Messiah's advent*, which are here set forth in a rich variety of expression, will form the subject of our present discourse.

God sent him,

I. To open a way for our salvation—

There were two great obstacles to the salvation of man, namely, guilt and corruption — — — And

For the removal of these the law made no adequate provision—

[There were sacrifices and various other services appointed for the removal of guilt: and the person who complied with the ordinances prescribed, was considered as absolved from his sin. But in the nature of things "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin." Indeed the annual repetition of the same offerings on the great day of atonement shewed, that the transgressions, which had been before atoned for, were not fully and finally forgiven: these repeated sacrifices were so many "remembrances of sins," intended to lead the minds of men to that greater sacrifice, which alone could "make them perfect as pertaining to the conscience," or procure to them a complete and "eternal redemption[c]."]

But what the law could not do, God sent his only dear Son to effect[d]—

["The Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself[e]:" by him Divine justice was to be satisfied, and the hand-writing that was against us, being nailed to his cross, was to be for ever cancelled[f]: he was so to "finish transgression, and make an end of sin" that no further sacrifice for it should ever be necessary: by his one offering he was to perfect for ever them that are sanctified[g]. All this has been done: through the blood of his cross, reconciliation is made between God and man[h]: God no more abhors the sinner, seeing that he is cleansed from sin in the Redeemer's blood, and is clothed in that spotless righteousness which Jesus has brought in[i]: nor does the sinner any longer hate God, because he is enabled to behold him as *his* God and Father in Christ. Thus is the breach completely

[c] Heb. ix. 9—12. and x. 1—4.
[d] Rom. viii. 3.
[e] Dan. ix. 27.
[f] Col. ii. 14.
[g] Heb. x. 11—14.
[h] Col. i. 21, 22.
[i] 2 Cor. v. 21.

closed: thus is man restored to the favour and love of God. thus are all typical sacrifices abrogated and annulled[k]: and thus are men delivered, no less from the love and practice of sin than from the curse and condemnation due to it[l]. Sin is no more remembered on the part of God, nor any more practised on the part of man.]

Thus far the subject is plain. What remains of our text is more difficult to be understood. But I conceive that the true sense of it will be marked, if we consider it as exhibiting yet farther the way devised for our salvation, and the sending of the Messiah,

II. To complete all that was necessary for its full accomplishment—

Two things were necessary to be effected by him:

1. He was to *fulfil for us* all that had been *predicted*—

[*There were a great variety of types and prophecies which designated the Messiah's work and character.* The first promise, given immediately after the fall, represented him as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head." In process of time other prophecies declared the family from which he should spring, the time and place of his birth, the minutest circumstances of his life and death, together with his subsequent exaltation and glory: moreover the whole nature of his undertaking, the various offices he was to sustain, with all the effects of his mission, were exactly delineated. Besides these, there were also many figurative representations instituted of God for the purpose of exhibiting to the world, as in a shadow, those things which were afterwards to be realized and substantially effected. Our first parents were clothed by God himself with the skins of beasts, which they had before been directed to offer in sacrifice; that, in that type, they might see the only true way of atoning for their sin, or covering their shame from the eyes of God. The various ordinances that were appointed under the Mosaic dispensation, the paschal lamb, whose sprinkled blood averted from the Israelites the sword of the destroying angel, while its flesh, eaten with bitter herbs, nourished their bodies; the daily and annual sacrifices, with all the sprinklings and other ceremonies; the habits and services of the priests, the form and furniture of the tabernacle, with many other things, which it would be tedious to

[k] Dan. ix. 27. [l] Tit. ii. 14.

enumerate, declared in ten thousand forms the work and offices of the promised Messiah.

All of these Christ was in the exactest manner to fulfil. Some parts of the inspired volume represented him as God, others as a man, yea, as "a worm and no man;" some as victorious, others as suffering; some as living for ever, others as dying; some as the priest, others as the sacrifice; some as a sanctuary, and others as a stumbling-block: all manner of opposites were to unite in him as lines in their centre, in order that, when he should appear, there should not exist a doubt in any unprejudiced mind, but that he was the person foretold; and that every thing respecting him had been fore-ordained in the Divine counsels. Accordingly when he came, he shewed himself to be that very Messiah, who, like a seal, engraven with strokes infinitely diversified, corresponded exactly with the impression which had been given of it to the Church two thousand years before. Thus did he "seal up the vision and prophecy," *completing it in all its parts*, and *leaving no further occasion for such methods of instruction.*]

2. He was to *impart to us* all that had been *promised*—

["The anointing of the most Holy" is generally thought to import, that Christ himself should receive the Spirit; but we apprehend that it imports also his communicating of the Spirit to his Church.

Christ is certainly "the Holy One and the Just," to whom the character of "The Most Holy" eminently belongs. It is certain also that he was anointed with the Spirit from his very first designation to preach the glad tidings of salvation[m]; and that he received a further unction when the Spirit descended upon him in a bodily shape like a dove[n]. But these do not appear to be the seasons alluded to in the text: the unction there spoken of seems to follow the other ends of his mission; and consequently to relate to something which took place after his ascension to heaven. The Psalmist speaks of Christ after his ascension, and consequent inauguration, when he says, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath *anointed thee with the oil of gladness* above thy fellows[o]." In another psalm he declares the same truth in still plainer terms; "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast *received gifts for men*, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them[p]." By consulting the Apostle Paul, we shall find that this gift which Jesus then received, was the Holy Spirit; and

[m] Isai. lxi. 1.
[n] Matt. iii. 16.
[o] Ps. xlv. 7.
[p] Ps. lxviii. 18.

that he received it in order that he might communicate it to his Church; for, quoting this very passage, he alters one word in it, and says, "he *gave* gifts unto men;" and then adds, that he gave these "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ[q]." But the testimony of another Apostle is absolutely decisive on this point: while St. Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down upon all the Apostles, and abode on each of them in the shape of cloven tongues of fire: the Apostle then declared that this was an accomplishment of Joel's prophecy respecting "the pouring out of God's Spirit;" and referred them to Jesus as the author of it, and as having received, *at this time*, the gift of the Spirit for this very end; "therefore," says he, "being exalted by the right hand of God, and *having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost*, Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear[r]." Thus was this holy oil poured out upon the head of our great High Priest, that it might flow down to the skirts of his garments, and reach to the meanest of his members[s].]

The ends of the Messiah's advent being so clearly and so fully declared, I wish you to OBSERVE—

1. What abundant provision God has made for our salvation—

[What can we conceive either as necessary or desirable beyond what our blessed Redeemer has done for us? What could the most guilty and abandoned sinner upon earth desire more of Christ, than that he should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, bring in for him an everlasting righteousness, and anoint him" with that same Spirit wherewith he himself is "anointed without measure[t]?" Or what evidence of his ability and willingness to do these things would any man have, beyond what the accomplishment of so many types and prophecies affords him? And shall God freely offer us this glorious salvation, and we not deign to receive it? O let us open our eyes, and behold our truest interest: let us not perish in the midst of mercy; let us not be famished when so rich a feast is set before us[u]; but let us comply with the Saviour's invitation, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved[x]."]

2. How deeply we are interested in obtaining the knowledge of Christ—

[q] Eph. iv. 8, 11, 12. [r] Acts ii. 3, 16, 33. [s] Ps. cxxxiii. 2.
[t] John iii. 34. [u] Isai. xxv. 6. [x] Song v. 1

[When the Apostles were asked by our Lord whether they also intended to forsake him, Peter well replied, "Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus must we say; for assuredly "there is salvation in no other; there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ[y]." In vain will be all our self-righteous endeavours to reconcile ourselves to God, or to renew our polluted hearts. "If Christ wash us not, we have no part with him[z]:" if he put not away our sins, they must abide upon us for ever: if he do not impart to us that "unction of the Holy One, whereby we know all things[a]," and "can do all things[b]," we must perish in our impotency, even as new-born infants that are left to themselves. Shall we then be regardless of the Saviour, and "perish for lack of knowledge," when God is thus labouring to instruct us? Shall we not rather, *like Daniel, pray day and night that we may obtain a clearer knowledge of his will?* Our neglect of *this* is the true reason why, with the Bible in our hands, we understand so little of this subject, and feel so little its sanctifying and saving efficacy. Would to God there were more Daniels in the midst of us! O let us henceforth "give more earnest heed to the things that are spoken;" and treasure up in our minds that truth of God, which alone can sanctify us, which alone can save us.]

[y] Acts iv. 12.
[z] John xiii. 8.
[a] 1 John ii. 20.
[b] Phil. iv. 13.

OUTLINE NO. 1141

DIFFERENT STATES OF MEN IN THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Dan. xii. 2, 3. *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever.*

THE immediate connexion of the text would lead us to expect something which shall take place when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to destroy all antichristian powers, and to establish his kingdom throughout the world. Of that period St. John speaks, as "the first resurrection[a]." But at that time the saints alone shall rise (whether really or mystically,

[a] Rev. xx. 5, 6.

we stop not to inquire): but at the time of which my text speaks, the wicked shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt. The prophet, therefore, must be understood as passing over the intermediate space between the destruction of Antichrist and the final judgment; and as speaking of what shall take place at that awful day, when Christ shall come to judge the world. In this way our blessed Lord introduces his description of the same awful period. He predicts the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and then almost blends with that the general judgment; so that it is not easy to determine with accuracy the precise point of his transition from the one event to the other. In truth, he seems in one place to quote the words of my text as referring to the last day; saying, "The hour is coming, when all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation[b]." Nor can we doubt but that the Jews in general understood Daniel as speaking of that period; and grounded chiefly upon his authority the belief, that "there should be a resurrection both of the just and unjust[c]."

Assuming this, then, to be the import of my text, I shall proceed to consider,

1. The different states of men in that great decisive day—

It cannot be, that all should receive the same doom at the hands of a righteous Judge—

Some will awake to everlasting life and honour—

[To the souls of men there is no death. The very instant they are separated from the body, they are transmitted to a place of happiness or misery, and receive a portion at least of that recompence which awaits them at the final judgment. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus this is strongly intimated. It appears also, from the promise made to the penitent thief, that on the very day of his crucifixion he should be with his Lord in Paradise. The body, in the mean time,

[b] John v. 28, 29. [c] Acts xxiv. 15.

will sleep in the dust. But at the sound of the trumpet in the last day, that also shall be raised; and, in a state of union with the soul, be made a partaker of the doom which the soul had before experienced. It once bore its part on all that was transacted by the soul: and all its powers shall at that day be so strengthened, that it shall be able to sustain its part also in all the blessedness or misery to which the soul has previously been consigned. The body will then be a spiritual body: and in it, no less than in his soul, shall every saint enjoy an eternity of bliss.]

Some, on the other hand, will arise to everlasting shame and contempt—

[The wicked, whilst in this world, so resembled the righteous, that there could not be a separation made between them. But at the last day, the tares and the wheat will be as easily distinguished from each other as goats from the sheep; and no longer will they grow together. "The ungodly will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." The wicked will then be disowned by all. The Saviour, who once laid down his life for them, and, during a long course of years, followed them with invitations and entreaties to accept of mercy, will then turn from them with disgust, and say, "Depart from me: I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity." The angels too, those benevolent spirits who once would have been glad to minister unto them as their attendants, will engage in dragging them from their retreats, and will "bind them up in bundles, to burn them." To all their former friends also, who once laboured for their welfare, will they be objects of abhorrence[d]: yea, to the devils themselves will they be objects of malignant triumph and reproachful exultation, as doubtless our first parents were after their fall; in that they were so foolish as to believe the lies of Satan, in preference to the truth of God.]

But let us mark especially what is spoken of,

II. The peculiar felicity of the saints—

They are here characterized as wise in their conduct, and as useful in their generation—

["They were once perhaps derided and despised as fools." But "they chose the better part," and therein approved themselves truly wise. "The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom:" and all are wise in proportion as they are regulated by it. But those who are "wise for themselves" will not be content to leave others in their folly, or to go to

[d] Isai. lxvi. 24.

heaven alone. They say to God, "Draw *me*, and *we* will run after thee:" that is, Draw me, and I will bring all I can along with me. This will be the endeavour of every soul that truly turns to God; and God will bless these labours of love, in whomsoever they may be found. If all are not called to speak in public, all have a sphere in which they may exert themselves to advantage: and all who are upright before God will employ their talents, whether in visiting the sick, or in the education of children, or at all events in instructing their own households and their more immediate friends. Activity in the cause of God is inseparable from true piety.]

And inconceivable will be their bliss—

[Perhaps the idea of our Lord's transfiguration may assist us a little in forming some faint conception of the appearance of the righteous in that day. We know that "their bodies shall then be changed like unto Christ's glorious body;" and in their souls also "they shall be like him:" and in all their powers, whether of soul or body, shall they be "filled with all the fulness of their God." The souls also, to whom in their day and generation they were useful, shall then be as jewels in their crown, and sources of augmented bliss and honour to all eternity.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are regardless of that day—

[Think, I pray you, what your feelings would now be, if all the evil that has ever passed in your hearts were made known to your fellow-creatures, I fear there would be very few of us that would not veil our faces with conscious shame, and be glad to hide ourselves in any distant retreat where we might escape the eyes of those who knew our guilt. What then will be your feelings in that day, when every abomination, with all its attendant aggravations, shall be exposed before the whole assembled universe? *Now* you may be able to glory in your shame; or may possibly be hardened into utter insensibility: but it will not be so then. Your sensibilities will be as quick and vivid, after millions of years, as at the first moment of your exposure; and your conscious desert of all the shame and contempt be as pungent as ever — — — Oh that I could prevail on you *now to humble yourselves*[e], that then you may be exalted; and now to clothe yourselves in the robe of Christ's righteousness, that then "the shame of your nakedness may not appear[f]."]

2. Those who are living in a state of preparation for it—

[e] Jer. iii. 25. [f] Rev. iii. 18.

[Possibly at this time you are objects of reproach to an ungodly world. But this, methinks, should be a small matter in your eyes. O, think what a change will take place in that day, and how the very people who now pour contempt upon you will envy your state! Think how God is now glorified in you; and how he will be glorified in you in that day, when all your sins, "if sought for, will not be found;" and glory, and honour, and immortality will be awarded to you, as your portion in the immediate presence of your God. Be daily preparing for that day; and in the full expectation of all this blessedness yourselves, be labouring with all your might to bring as many as possible to a participation of it.]

END OF VOL. IX.